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ABSTRACT

Designed to preserve the rich heritage of the rural school system which passed from the education scene in the 1930's and 1940's, this narrative, part history and part nostalgia, describes the author's own elementary education and the secure community life centered in the one room Spring Valley School in Hamilton County, Iowa, in the early decades of the century. Remembered are the octagonal clock hung over wainscoting; the dry sandwich in the lunch pail in the pre-waxpaper era; the dark recesses of the cloakroom where you searched for a lost mitten; the recitation bench to which you were called for class sessions; the double desks shared with a seat mate; the quotation or maxim given in response to roll call; the water bucket in lieu of plumbing and streamlined faucets; the "open" classroom in which older pupils were always available to help beginners; the annual visit of the county superintendent; the long noon hours of robust play on the schoolground and lengthy walks to and from school contributing to physical fitness; the bone tired weariness at day's end during a two-week cornhusking "vacation"; and the school buses and improved roads allowing all weather travel and marking the demise of the one room school. The passing of the one room school includes the passing of an age whose educational philosophy emphasized book learning, goals for personal achievement, and family and community traditions. (NEC)

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J. Clarine J. Boyken

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Echoes of Spring Valley

J. Clarine J. Boyken

Dedicated to my first grade teacher, Mathilda Ringstad Johnson, who is also my mother, and to my eighth grade teacher, Florence Henderson Vespestad, who gave me vision, and to my husband, Edward Boyken, whose cooperation was so necessary to the writing of this book.

J. Clarine J. Boyken

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4

Foreword

Spring Valley School, located in the north central part of Scott Township, Hamilton County, Iowa, operated as an independent district, as differentiated from the township system. Under this system, according to the best research available at the present time, a board of directors consisted of three members, with the chairman carrying the heaviest responsibility. Only one director served his school district under the township system. Schools in the independent system chose individual names, rather than to be designated as Lincoln #2, Lyon #4, etc., which was the case in neighboring townships using the township system of school government. Thus the school of my memories bore the melodious name of Spring Valley, so derived from the spring located at the foot of the hill in an adjacent pasture.

The book is not intended to be an accurate account of the history of the school, but rather Spring Valley School and the community surrounding it in the early decades of the twentieth century, as I remember the school and the community.

Hopefully, the succeeding pages will provoke memories, not only for former pupils of Spring Valley, but for all who received their elementary education in a rural school anywhere in the nation. The book is designed to preserve for posterity the rich heritage of the rural school system which passed from the education scene somewhere in the thirties and forties, and which is likely never to be revived again. School days at Spring Valley, as at all the past rural schools of the nation which are exemplified by Spring Valley, constituted a rich American heritage.

J. Clarine J. Boyken

5

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Mattie Reece, retired school teacher who began her teaching career in the one room rural school, her own early elementary education having been received in a Hamilton County, Iowa, rural school early in the century, for her numerous suggestions helpful to the stimulation of memory.

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Contents

I When You And I Were Young 1

II Reading, Writing, And Arithmetic ... 11

III Pump, Pump, Pull Away 23

IV A Distinguished Guest 27

V Through The Seasons At Spring Valley 31

VI A Stranger In Our Midst 81

VII Portents Of Progress 87

VIII Rooted, Yet Wings To Soar 97

I

When You and I Were Young

[1]"I wandered today to the hill, Maggie,
To watch the scene below,
The creek and the old rusty mill, Maggie,
Where we sat in the long, long ago.
The green grove is gone from the hill, Maggie,
Where first the daisies sprung;
The old rusty mill is still, Maggie,
Since you and I were young."
—George W. Johnson, J. A. Butterfield

Echoes of the song sung lustily by school children have long since died from the valley where, at the crest of the hill, was nestled the little one room school bearing proudly the name "Spring Valley". In a fast moving auto I am borne quickly past the scene of childhood school days. I put down a fleeting impulse to halt the car, thinking to retrace the pounding steps up the hill as in yesteryear. We, the pupils, came from the four corners of the school district—the Swensons from the south, the Mortvedts from the east, the Brintons from the west, and, from the north, my brother and I, the Johnsons. Every farmstead was occupied by families of young children. As they grew to school age, we were joined by the children of the Elmer Mortvedt family, another Johnson family, and the Stenberg girls, and with children from the various families occupying at different times a rented eighty acre farm in the district. Arriving at school early we were often granted permission to go to meet pupils coming from the other direction. Then would ensue a race to the schoolyard, a pounding of feet up the hill. One quick glance reveals that all that is left of the familiar Spring Valley is the creek below. No amount of further exploration would restore the scenes of childhood. The seven branched tree where oft we let our imaginations run wild is gone from the hill. No more do school girls ascend its hospitable branches with easily accessible crotches, claiming a favorite for a noon hour of day dreaming,

9

friendly chatting, or an excursion into make believe, transforming leafy boughs into an enchanting cottage. Playing "house" was always a favorite of female progeny in the early decades of the twentieth century, at least in rural areas. Home life centered around mother's kitchen, in some homes was apt to in fact be bound by the walls of that very kitchen, and girls were fascinated with cooking and homemaking. Almost non-existent was the mother who pushed her daughter into young womanhood and the wiles of attracting the opposite sex at a premature age. Gone, too, is the mulberry tree at the corner of the playground, and the patch of "Grandpa leaves", green, ferny, and pungent, which were often plucked and pressed in heavy geography books. Any such books stowed away in attics today would likely bear the green stain of such a pressed leaf. Aside from a source of leaf specimens, this area of the schoolground was almost unused, as it traditionally was infested with poison ivy. Throughout eight years of elementary education there was no instance of a pupil's suffering from an attack of poison ivy, nor was the plant ever pointed out to us. Nevertheless, it was avoided like "poison" by the entire enrollment from year to year.

Most noticeably gone from the hill is the schoolhouse itself. A treasure of early Americana, it stood at the crest of the hill, commanding a view of the valley below, and visible from the homes of all but the most distant children in attendance there. An oblong, white sided structure with end gables, wood-shingled roof, it was identical to thousands of country schoolhouses throughout our nation. Notwithstanding its common architecture, each was uniquely different in a number of distinctive ways, as was Spring Valley. A large cement platform approached by a single step formed the entrance to the structure's only door. Unique was the large stone, or rock, just off the platform, used alternately for sitting to chat with a friend, jumping onto from the platform, setting wet shoes out to dry, scraping mud off boots, but most importantly for the daily task of dusting erasers. Memory of that chore calls to mind the smell of dry, choking chalk dust. Bearing brush strokes of brown paint, it must have been used at some time as a convenient spot to clean paint brushes, when the interior was deemed in need of a bit of freshening. Dinner "buckets", too, were often set on "the rock", comparatively safe from infestation by ants and other bugs, while its owner hurriedly joined schoolmates at play.

The schoolhouse door opened to a narrow hall flanked by coat closets on either side—one for the boys and one for the girls. An inner door led to the schoolroom from which the coat closets

were entered. A trap door in the hall ceiling gave access to an attic. We school children often fantisized the descent of a tramp through that door in the ceiling.

I do not know what fostered this figment of our imagination, but country schoolhouses did offer warm havens of shelter to numerous vagrants from time to time. I remember one day when the excitement of lurking danger dominated our school room. That morning our teacher had startled a sleeping tramp upon entering the schoolhouse. He at once arose and took his leave, with neither the room nor the teacher the worse for the encounter. Our community did not look upon the occasional "hobo", or tramp, with a charitable eye. Pleas for offerings of

11

food were usually granted, but he was regarded with dark suspicion and often with fear for personal safety. Each ensuing morning must have required an extra measure of courage on the part of the teacher until the incident was forgotten. The schoolhouse door had no key. Winter and summer, day and night, the door remained unlocked.

Lunch containers were stowed in the dark hall closets until the noon lunch hour, with perhaps a cookie to be eaten at recess, often at the disapproval of the teacher. School "marms" really on their toes felt it their duty to supervise the nutritional needs of children entrusted to their tutelage. An occasional pupil was wont to devour the contents of his bucket at the morning recess, leaving nothing for midday succor. At day's end a child whose stomach sides were rubbing together was not likely to be an apt pupil.

I recall the joy of my first real lunch box. Equipped with double handles similar to those of a market basket, it was enameled a delectable pink. It was my pride and joy. At first I carefully guarded it against bumps and scratches but before year's end it was somewhat the worse for wear. Swinging it in hand as I jounced along the three quarter's mile traversed morning and evening, it was inevitable that, relaxing my vigilance, it would be dropped now and then. Some of my schoolmates had similar lunch boxes, painted in various colors—reds, blues, greens—and some were ornately decorated with designs in gold paint. Dinner "pail" was often more applicable to a lunch container. Lard buckets and molasses pails made inexpensive containers quite resistant to bangs and dents. Their one drawback was the difficulty with which they were opened. Mothers felt no concern, however, over sending such a lunch container with a tender young beginner. She was justly confident that the teacher would kindly oblige by prying open the lid, or else designate some older child to come to his assistance. The same applied to hard to peel oranges. The classic lunch was a sandwich, piece of fruit, and a cookie. Wax paper was a luxury not to be afforded. Bread was baked at home, thus no wrappers were available. I well remember the hard, dry sandwich, the "kringla"* for a treat, oft mingled with the flavor of an orange from its close association with the fruit in the lunch bucket. Sandwiches as a party treat have never since found favor in my eyes.

Cloak rooms or halls were situated on either side of the entry hall—boys to the right, girls to the left. A row of shelves at the end accommodated dinner pails, caps, and mittens. Coats were hung on designated "hooks", more often a nail driven into the wall. Conscious of safety, they were ensconsed with wooden spools.

Interior finishing of the entire schoolhouse was wainscoating painted ivory with the portion below the chair rail a deep tan. The floor was of bare, unfinished boards. I can still see the red sweeping compound scattered over the boards after school each evening preparatory to sweeping, a necessary part of the teacher's daily routine.

Dominating the room was the pot-bellied heating stove set in the very center in an effort to evenly heat the room. To the teacher fell the duties of starting the fire on cold fall mornings, carrying in necessary fuel, and carrying out ashes. In the dead of winter the fire was usually "banked" with ashes at the end of the day, hopefully to ensure some warmth preserved for the following morning. A dedicated teacher made it a point to arrive extra early in sub-zero weather in order that the schoolhouse might be warm for the first arrivals. Failure to be conscientious in this area dubbed her irresponsible, but sometimes a compassionate director did provide this service for her. There were times, however, when the best of intentions failed to provide a warm welcome for students on the very coldest days. The banking had failed to hold, the stove functioned improperly, perhaps filling the room with smoke so that an airing was necessary, or else the frigid morning air penetrated the uninsulated walls so completely that comfortable heating was an impossibility. On such mornings, we were permitted to hover around the perimeter of the stove, with the day's schedule conducted from that area in a haphazard manner. Such days were exciting to us, and often provided a break in the monotony of studying during long winter months. Eventually the inadequate heater was replaced with a furnace designed to circulate hot and cold air. Set in the corner of the schoolroom, a cold air duct brought in fresh air from outside. It was much more reliable in holding a fire all night through, and must have made the floor warmer, but it eliminated the fun of gathering around the stove bundled into outdoor wraps during the first hour of school. There was no warm chrome "fender" on which to thaw feet icy cold from the walk to school.

At the front of the schoolroom was the usual blackboard. Not so usual, however, was the material of which it was constructed. It was merely wide wooden boards painted black. When progress dictated that something should be done about this, new slate board was installed over the boards. My father happened to be a director at that time and in my mind there is a mental picture of the blackboard being brought home, perhaps from the freight train, in his automobile, a touring car, an "Overland" with a right hand steering wheel. With both back doors open to accommodate the width of the blackboard, he transported it to the schoolhouse and installed it.

Dad took real pride in his status as a director of the school. Conscientious to the most minute detail, he gave careful care to the physical plant of the school. All obligations were fulfilled promptly and enthusiastically by him. Being himself possessed of a limited education, he found delight in bringing the schoolroom up-to-date as much as possible for that era.

Ensconsed on a raised platform was the teacher's desk, much revered by the entire enrollment. It was respected as her private territory, and no one dared touch a thing on it without permission. Teacher's manuals and a copy of the state "Course of Study" made a neat row across the front, supported by bookends. The teacher's "Captain's chair" was seldom occupied during the day. Most teachers moved out to the front of the desk to conduct classes, though barely enough standing room was left

14

on the platform. Pupils were called to the front of the room to be seated on the long "recitation bench" for classes. Classes were necessarily of short duration, with much seat work, since the entire curriculum for all eight grades was directed by a single teacher.

Because of stringent time limitations, each class was a no-nonsense academic session. Pupils were expected to come to the recitation bench well prepared with assigned lessons. History and geography classes were designed to be class discussion sessions, not pedagogic lectures. If it were obvious that preparation was lacking, a particular class of students was ordered to return to individual study desks. The class period was rescheduled for a later hour, or perhaps even after school. It was mandatory that written work be handed in. If not completed at day's end, students were expected to stay after school until such work was finished. There were priorities, however, even during class recitations, among them requests for help with assignments from those of other grade levels. A request for word pronunciation, a difficult arithmetic problem, or an explanation of directions always met with patient response from the dedicated rural teacher, as she took seriously her mission to teach.

On either side of the room there was a row of six or eight double desks, graduated in size from very small to a dimension designed to fit a large eighth grade boy. Little concern was shown, however, over the proper fit of a desk. One simply made do with what was available. It was a cardinal sin to sit with legs extended into the aisle, but what was a large overgrown boy to do? Not necessarily overgrown, I remember one eighth grade boy who must have found the aisle a more comfortable place to rest his feet. There were exasperated admonitions from a teacher commanding him to "put his feet under his desk".

Artificial lighting was nonexistent. Windows were located alongside either row of desks to provide natural light for studying. A "good" teacher often stayed until darkness prohibited further work, then departed bearing an armload of papers to correct, posters to make, and lesson plans to formulate. Papers handed in were collected throughout the day on a tall spike with a weighted bottom. This was before the days of exchanging papers to be corrected in class. No self-respecting teacher would resort to such time saving methods. Unheard of was the principle that pupils also learn from correcting papers. There was the added fact of small enrollment, with often a single person in a given class, making such an exchange an impossibility.

A first at the end of each school day was the chore of sweeping the floor, washing the blackboard, and a general tidying. Occasionally an overzealous student stayed after to help with these chores. A particularly enterprising teacher often designated helpers, even to carrying in fuel for the following day. Parents frowned upon such practices. Pupils big enough to be of real help were wanted at home for necessary chores, and it was felt the teacher should do the work she was being paid to do. Also, there was the stigma of the taunt "teacher's pet" for such would-be helpers.

The schoolroom was brightened by art prints hung on either side. Ticking away the hours of the school day was the traditional octagonal clock. The face was embellished with Roman numerals. A pendulum was visible through the glassed-in box below. A map case attracted the attention of the entire classroom when its lid was dropped and a map rolled down, as did the globe suspended from the ceiling when lowered.

The crowning feature of the schoolroom was the "library". This was a set of bookshelves hinged to the wall. Access was made possible by unlatching and swinging out the entire structure, the groaning at the hinges so disturbing to concentration of study that permission to use the "library" was grudgingly granted. Its contents were my greatest source of pleasure and the scarcity of books developed within me a deep appreciation of books as treasures.

As compared with the schoolroom of today, Spring Valley School would have to have been considered the extremity of poverty, and we, the pupils, would have been dubbed "disadvantaged". Dismal as our surroundings may have been, in them we were stimulated to a real love of learning, and with it, a love for our schoolroom. In my mind I can still conjure the sensation of the lovely aura of tranquil contentment that permeated the room on a bright January afternoon—the long, slant rays of winter sunshine zooming in on heads studiously bent over lessons, a geography lesson in session at the recitation bench inviting dreams of far away places, and the pendulum of the wall clock rhythmically ticking off the minutes. Though now and then we felt excitement at news filtering in to our small "corner" of the globe, we were comfortably secure among our own people, and the schoolhouse was the hub of the community.

- “Kringla”, a Norwegian cake-type of cookie, recipe below:

KRINGLA

Beat together—
- 1 cup sugar
- 1½ cups sour cream
- 1 tsp. vanilla

Sift together—
- 2½ cups sifted flour
- 1 tsp. soda
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt

Add dry ingredients to cream mixture, add enough flour to form dough stiff enough to be workable with hands. Cut off strips and roll into long ropes with hands, as if rolling clay. Twist to form wreath or a written (not printed) capital J on a cookie sheet. Bake at 425° for about ten minutes. Brush lightly with slightly beaten egg white, dip in sugar, if desired.

The baked kringla minus the sugar dusting were virtually crumbless when eaten. This propensity coupled with the abundance of cream on the farm in that era made the recipe a popular one.

II

Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic

A pre-requisite for admittance to high school in the days of the rural school was the "passing" of seventh and eighth grade county examinations. These examinations were administered by faculty members of secondary schools throughout the state, and given twice annually, in February and in May. The tests covered all the basic subjects of elementary education: reading, arithmetic, spelling, geography, history, language (English), civics (government), physiology, and music. It was customary for seventh grade students to take only three or four, concentrate on preparation for them, and then during the last year or eighth year to work diligently to prepare for the remaining tests. Also, it was not considered advisable to take all the remaining tests in February of the eighth year, as eighth grade subjects covered vital topics in the last months of the year. Arithmetic, in particular, was deficient at mid-year, interest calculations being one of the last processes taught. Thus it was usually left until May. The May examinations afforded a second chance on those written in February if a higher grade were needed.

My own experiences of "county exams" will be ingrained forever in my memory. My first trip marked the emergence from the security of all that was dear and familiar in the academic world. There were only two of us in the seventh grade that year. My classmate, Homer Brinton, chose to write his exams at the town of Randall. I accompanied my older brother, Merlin, of high school age, to Ellsworth Consolidated School. We rode in what was the accepted mode of conveyance for the regular route of transporting school children to and from school in the snowy months, a bobsled. I remember the kindness of the older girls on the route as they shepherded me to the room where examinations were to be administered. Even so, I recall the bewilderment of stepping from the cold sled ride to an overheated, steam heated building, bustling with the loud confusion of junior high and senior high students' socializing briefly before school was called to order for the day.

Since only four examinations were on my agenda, not all the day was taken up with testing. In hush-hush tones in the cloak hall we made new acquaintances among other exam writers. Leisurely walks down town with new found friends took up some of our time. Foreseeing this, I had been provided with money to purchase noon lunch at the local restaurant. This was my first experience at ordering a meal in a restaurant, and also a first experience at handling the expense by myself. I recall my mother's chagrin at learning that I had ordered, not something special which was unavailable at home, but a fried egg sandwich! There being no table menus, I had no idea what a restaurant might serve, so I ordered what I was sure would be readily available.

The homeward trip in the bobsled proved a bit exciting. The "bus" driver had permitted his son to "hop" a ride with his coasting sled. All went well for about a mile—until the driver became so intent upon watching for the safety of his son that he inadvertently guided the team of horses too close to the snow filled ditch. Suddenly the bobsled overturned, spilling passengers out into a snowbank. No harm was done. There were no injuries, the sled was soon uprighted, and we were once more homeward bound-with the coasting sled and rider in the bobsled.

The tests were by no means easy, nor was grading done on the curve prevalent today. Grading was strictly on the percentage basis, grades recorded in numbers, with anything below seventy recorded as failing. Also, the system of testing known as multiple choice was as yet unknown, as was matching, or any other form which would suggest an answer if the pupil were entirely blank on the subject. Essay questions were commonly used, especially in subjects such as history, government, geography, and physiology.

The state wanted to know specifically whether or not an applicant for admission to high school from a rural school possessed not only the basic skills but the reservoir of knowledge to enable him to carry the load of what then was uniform secondary education. In spite of the second chance, and, in fact, even a third chance allowed aspiring applicants who had almost made it (in the summer these pupils had an opportunity to go to the county seat to try once more to pass failed examinations), there were many for whom the end of eighth grade marked the end of formal education. Because standards were very high, there were bound to be some who simply could not make the grade, there were others who had no desire to and who received little or no encouragement from the home, and the day had not come when transportation to high school was considered mandatory for school districts. In the days of Spring Valley, all weather roads did not extend out into the far reaches, nor was the automobile reliable in winter. Most family autos were of the touring variety, with side curtains which were hooked on in winter, and blankets and robes afforded what little warmth could be attained. The glove was not to be found that could keep hands warm while firmly gripping the steering wheel. Rare, too, was the boy whose father permitted him to drive the family auto to school, tying up family transportation on a day long basis, and rarer still the teen-ager with his own car. Few and far between were the girls who had learned to drive, though a driver's license was not yet required. It was simpler, therefore, to stay home and contribute to production on the family farm, and occasionally both boys and girls were able to hire out for either part or full time work. This was called "working out".

This weeding out of students was no doubt responsible in part for the maintenance of high standards on the secondary level, both in curriculum requirements and scholastic achievement. It might also have eliminated the problem of the high school drop out. There was then no question as to relevance of required courses. Students who attained a high school diploma had necessarily studied at length subjects of formal, book learning.

Aside from grooming seventh and eighth graders for county "exams", the rural schoolteacher had the important task of teaching beginners to read, to add and subtract, multiply and divide, as well as the inumerable classes for all the intermediate grades. Somehow order had to be maintained throughout the day's strenuous schedule, and interesting and stimulating activities provided for those not yet able to study independently.

From time immemorial, beginners had been provided with "busy work" throughout the recitations of other classes. In the early decades of the century, however, work with the purpose of merely keeping busy had begun to be frowned upon, and the true work sheet had been devised, based upon the lessons of the day. School supply companies prevailed upon teachers to purchase these aids to make for more free time after hours. No school board would provide funds for such shortcuts. Teachers, too, supplied their own duplicators, usually a gelatin hectograph. Not much duplicating was necessary, however, as grades with more than two or three pupils were the exception. Thus mere carbon or "tracing paper" usually sufficed.

Enrollment at Spring Valley was not necessarily small. On a certain year the count rose to twenty-five, and chair desks had to be imported. These were set in the middle of the room. We thought them to be sophisticated classroom furniture, and their mobility appealed to us as they were not bolted to the floor. We found delight, too, in the large enrollment, as it served to make our school day more interesting. I'm sure we never gave a thought to the added burden for the teacher.

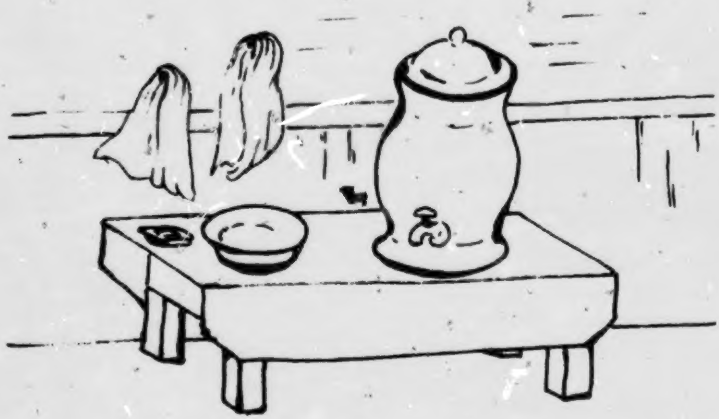
The enrollment represented all eight grades, a real challenge to the teacher. Ready helpers were usually available from older and quick learning pupils. These frequently were given permission to help little ones needing help, to hear someone's spelling words, to listen to a poem that was to be memorized, or to help someone with arithmetic problems. Gladys Swenson, a special childhood friend, recalls that she often requested permission to seek help from me with long addition problems. The effectiveness of my help must have been questionable for, she purports, I simply did them for her. Gladys was my seat mate in a double desk one year. The close association was mutually enjoyed. She must have learned computation somewhere, for in adulthood she became a successful business woman, operating a small business of her own.

"Sitting together" was a frequently granted request toward the end of the day, with the admonition to "be quiet", and after first ensuring that assignments for the following day had been completed. The double desk easily accommodated this activity when enrollment was small. During years of large enrollment, sitting together was a permanent assignment, with attention given to those who could get along together in the matter of keeping an orderly desk and working without bothering a seatmate. The usual activity following granted permission to "sit together", was coloring, cutting, and pasting, always accompanied by quiet visiting. Tracing from the well worn pages of Spring Valley's copy of the "Latta Book" was a real privilege, and one had to be careful not to press too hard in order not to mutilate or wear out the design.

Other requests to be acknowledged, granted, or refused in the course of conducting the day's classes were the usual ones to leave the room, get a drink, "speak" to someone, and sharpen a pencil. "Speaking" to someone was construed to be important, such as the borrowing of paper, pencils, or asking a question about an assignment. When a violation occurred, a reprimand was forthcoming and future requests granted were hard to come by. To save the confusion of too much dialogue during classes conducted, a system of raised fingers was usually instituted, so that a mere nod or a shake of the head was all that was necessary to allow or refuse the petitioner.

For the most part a very high standard of curriculum was maintained at Spring Valley school and those who sought to avail themselves of the opportunity were well able to compete with their contemporaries educated in more "modern" town schools. Science, as a grade school course, was not yet formally taught even in city schools, and introduction to it was usually by way of "General Science" in the freshman year of high school. Health was taught in the rural school as a comprehensive course of physiology in the sixth grade, but much health education was given incidentally and through use of health charts encouraging good personal hygiene. Posters also illustrated good health habits. Spring Valley provided elementary education before the days of the pre-school health examination and the now almost universal immunization shots and vaccinations. Good health rules prevailed in that the school water bucket was emptied into a cooler or fountain of crockery from which we filled our own individual drinking cups through a spigot. The common dipper was outlawed. We were encouraged to wash our hands upon returning from "excused" absence from the classroom. Disposable paper towels were provided as a further measure of sanitation.

Smallpox invaded the community when a family member of a teacher became ill of the communicable disease. Stringent measures taken to avoid widespread infection included utmost



23

cleanliness of the teacher's personal effects upon her being quarantined out of the family home, Miss Henderson having been vaccinated in childhood during a previous epidemic. The school was closed for a short period and all pupils urged to be vaccinated by a family doctor. Compliance was universal, and no smallpox cases occurred at Spring Valley. The incident was a blessing in disguise, having provided the impetus for heretofor neglected vaccination.

Scarlet fever occurred more commonly and upon occasion schoolmates were "quaratined in" with the disease, sometimes for periods of many weeks, while various family members were infected. Considered most important after such a bout was a thorough fumigation of the home and clothing before the family was allowed to circulate in the community. One lived in dread of contracting the disease.

One spring, right after school was dismissed for the year, my two brothers and I simultaneously came down with chickenpox, and immediately following broke out with measles. Most of our schoolmates experienced the same fate, getting those two then necessary childhood infections out of the way in a hurry.

Music experiences were afforded daily through opening exercises and a formal course in music theory was included in seventh grade curriculum. Of course, there was no instrumental music training, but grade bands were not very common even in city schools. Such opportunities were at that time available only on a private basis. A few Spring Valley pupils did take private piano lessons. Others had learned tunes by ear or by rote, which were pounded out at noon during long winter months on an old pump organ. The organ had been donated to the school by a patron family, the Oscar Swensons, upon the purchase of a piano. The piano was considered a more modern instrument for home use. If the organ is still in existence, it no doubt graces someone's home as a valuable antique. Had it not been given to the school, it would most likely have been obliterated by the tornado which at a later date demolished the Swenson home.

In the matter of formal book learning, Spring Valley was quite adequate, the only exception being an occasional teacher who was wont to slack off in hearing "recitations", failing to have regular daily classes, or perhaps neglecting to schedule one entirely, to the protest of knowledgeable patrons. Individual attention was a matter of course; anonymity was an impossibility. A plus was the distinct advantage of learning ahead of one's grade merely by sitting in on recitations in the "open" classroom.

I can still see the spelling book, published by Horn-Ashbaugh, I believe, a small thin volume, olive in color, with lists of words in dark type. Spelling was listed as orthography on our monthly report card. (Report cards were issued monthly, rather than at six or nine week intervals.) The speller also contained quotations from famous people, those of Ben Franklin most prevalent. The lists of words were interspersed with dictation. "Dictation" required that not only must the words be spelled correctly, but also that every punctuation mark be in place.

The brown arithmetic textbooks bore a name which I remember as "Hamilton". The text gave instruction in the basic facts, learned by memorization and supplemented with flash card drill. Daily assignments reinforced the learned facts through much repetition, and problem solving in the form of "written problems" gave much practice in reasoning and computation. There was not a single picture in the arithmetic text book.

I have a clear mental picture of the geography book, but the publisher's name escapes me. A larger and thicker volume, it was a favorite text, as it was interspersed with pictures of lands and peoples I never dreamed of seeing first hand. I shall always remember the full page spread of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado in Arizona. I turned often to the page to gaze and gaze upon the reds, blues, and purples pictured there. To this day I have not seen the Grand Canyon with my own eye. On a family trip a number of years ago we drove within eighty miles of the scenic wonderland, but we had a time schedule to which to adhere. The geography book does keep recurring in my mind's eye when traveling. I shall always remember the thrill of looking down upon the New York City skyline from a jet for a first time, remembering a picture from the geography book at Spring Valley. Even more thrilling was the sight of the Great Lakes spread out below, just as on a geography relief map. In the days of Spring Valley no one even dreamed of ever flying high enough to see the lakes laid out below as on a map. Yellowstone Park, too, was portrayed as an enchanting place to visit. We spent much time one winter making booklets of Yellowstone Park. We were fascinated with Old Faithful, Handkerchief Pool, and the variety of wild animals. Going through a childhood treasure chest this winter, Merlin and I found his booklet still intact. On the fly leaf he had written: "To the National Parks of our beloved country, the United States, this book is dedicated." The cover was of green construction paper, illustrated with a dip ink pen, the illustration portraying the Yellowstone forest and a deer. Numerous pictures of scenes of Yellowstone were pasted into the

25

booklet, a neatly written description of each feature accompanying each picture. The penmanship was his best, grammar meticulous, and each page was uniformly margined.

I wonder where the pictures came from. Perhaps our teacher supplied us with magazines to cut up. Certainly no family at Spring Valley had even so much as a National Geographic magazine, let alone travel magazines. The only magazine which came into my childhood home was the Wallaces Farmer, but we did have the Des Moines Register, the local weekly, at times the county seat paper, and for some reason, always the Kansas City Star. At any rate, as I worked on the booklet, a visit to Yellowstone Park was beyond my wildest dreams. Occasionally we would know of someone who traveled to the park on a summer vacation, usually a professional man and his family, as vacation for country people was more likely to be a day at the State Fair. Through the years of adulthood I have visited and revisited Yellowstone Park, enjoying each visit more than the one before. My son, Mark, a medical doctor, with his wife, Barbra, spent an entire summer at the park as a park doctor. He reports that no casual visitor ever really sees more than a passing glance at park wonders, as time to visit the remote areas is required to really give one an appreciation of the place.

The study of history at Spring Valley was begun in fourth grade and there was much memorizing of dates, names, and events. Tests were almost always essay type questions. In history we were taught that the Pilgrims came to America seeking freedom for religion. We learned of President Wilson's abortive plans for a league of Nations to ensure world peace and we were taught to take pride in that our nation led the world in disarmament following World War I. I do not recall that our school ever had an American flag, but perhaps there was one. We did not give the pledge of allegiance to the flag. Though I was exposed to a few years of 4-H, I was adult before I learned the pledge of allegiance. It was a post-war era (WWI) and the populace of the nation wanted to forget everything that had been stressed in wartime. People who frequently displayed the flag were thought to be "flag-wavers", and anything military was to be shunned as evil. There were no military toys in the stores. History supposedly goes in cycles, and we are once more in the era of pressure for disarmament. So soon have we forgotten the lesson of Pearl Harbor--"Preparedness, not disarmament, is a greater detterent to war".

A chance encounter with a pupil from the "sophisticated" town school gave us a vague notion of semester tests, but none were administered at Spring Valley. Instead, we were subjected to "Final Exams". We were expected to retain all that we had learned throughout the year. I do remember envying the town acquaintances in that their test reviews involved only half a year's work.

Town cousins of the Brinton children sometimes visited our school during semester test week. Excelling in their classes, they were excused from semester tests, and thus enjoyed a bonus vacation.

English, or language, was taught meticulously, not only at the recitation bench, but throughout the day in the schoolroom and on the playground. An innovation of a certain teacher was the "ain't jail". Anyone heard to use the word had his name recorded there. The penalty was to "sit in" at recess. Well learned were the parts of speech, correct usage, and sentence construction. We had memorization of poetry, some creative writing, and even an introduction to literature through opening exercises, when the teacher read aloud for an alotted time each day to the entire school. Spring Valley's English course of study had to have been excellent—in high school I was wont to argue with an English teacher on many a fine point, only to have her come back to class the following day to inform me that I had been right. Again, upon enrollment at Iowa State Teachers College, now University of Northern Iowa, placement tests eliminated me from English I, allowing for an extra elective. Therefore, I had no college English handbook. When enrolled in practice teaching the supervisor corrected my lesson plans as to English usage concerning the subjunctive mood. Questioning the corrections, I was directed to look it up in my English handbook. All that was needed for proof of my stand was the declaration that I had been excused from English I, and so had no handbook in my possession.

Teacher's manuals were supplied by the school, but all other text books were purchased by parents at the local drug store in the nearest town. In all my eight years at Spring Valley I remember no changes in text books. Among text books used were the Baldwin and Bender readers. From an early reader I recall the following poem:

LITTLE GUSTAVA [2]
Celia Thaxter

Little Gustava sits in the sun,
Safe in the porch, and the little drops run

From the icicles under the eaves so fast,
For the bright spring sun shines warm at last,
And glad is little Gustava.

She wears a quaint little scarlet cap,
And a little green bowl she holds in her lap,
Filled with bread and milk to the brim,
And a wreath of marigolds round the rim:
"Ha! ha!" laughs little Gustava.

Up comes her little gray coaxing cat
With her little pink nose, and she mews, "What's that?"
Gustava feeds her-she begs for more;
And a little brown hen walks in at the door:
"Good day!" cries little Gustava.

She scatters crumbs for the little brown hen.
There comes a rush and a flutter, and then
Down fly her little white doves so sweet,
With their snowy wings and their crimson feet:
"Welcome!" cries little Gustava.

So dainty and eager they pick up the crumbs;
But who is this through the doorway comes?
Little Scotch terrier, little dog Rags,
Looks in her face, and his funny tail wags:
"Ha! ha!" laughs little Gustava.

"You want some breakfast too? and down
She sets her bowl on the brick floor brown,
And little dog Rags drinks up her milk,
While she strokes his shaggy locks like silk:
"Dear Rags!" says little Gustava.

Waiting without stood sparrow and crow,
Cooling their feet in the melting snow:
"Won't you come in, good folk?" she cried.
But they were too bashful, and stood outside
Though "Pray come in!" cried Gustava.

So the last she threw them, and knelt on the mat
With doves and biddy and dog and cat.
And her mother came to the open house-door:
"Dear little daughter, I bring you some more,
My merry little Gustava!"

Kitty and terrier, biddy and doves,
All things harmless Gustava loves.
The shy, kind creatures 'tis joy to feed,
And oh, her breakfast is sweet indeed
To happy little Gustava!

Character building and good morals were taught incidentally throughout the school day. A frequent practice was that of responding to morning roll call with a quotation or maxim from a famous or successful person. These quotations were also scattered throughout the spelling books, as aforementioned, and the language books. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again",[3] "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today", "A thing worth doing at all is worth doing well", "A penny saved is a penny earned," "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise",[4] "Give me liberty, or give me death!"[5] are a few that come to mind. Moral dissertations were often the subject of the dictation given either as a spelling or a language lesson.

Perfect attendance was encouraged by a system of certificates. Only one year was I able to establish a record for having been neither absent nor tardy. On that year I must have been gleefully free of the colds which plagued childhood then as now. The tardiness record, however, caused me real mortification on a certain morning in the winter. I must have been daydreaming while dressing for school that morning. On the last stretch of the walk to school I suddenly realized that I had forgotten to step into my skirt! Remembering my attendance record, the hasty decision was made to sit through the day with my heavy coat covering the petticoat. Unfortunately, the day was not one when the schoolroom was frigid enough to demand outer wraps for everyone, so my bundled appearance demanded an explanation to the teacher. Needless to say, there were no secrets at Spring Valley, due to close physical quarters, and I was forced to endure the titters that rippled over the room. Thanks to a kind and loving father, I was soon rescued from my embarrassment. A knock on the schoolhouse door was sounded and the opened door revealed Dad bearing a small parcel carefully wrapped in newspaper. Gratefully, I received it from him and no reproach was forthcoming. He smiled his understanding and left to retrace his steps. My father had traversed by foot a distance of almost a mile because of my irresponsibility, yet he did not scold. Remembering this, I have upon occasion interrupted my own busy schedule to cross the street to the classroom of a son with a textbook or an assignment left behind. Being a parent, one is apt to waiver between compassion and the need to teach self-sufficiency through bitter experience, but in the case of the forgotten school item, love always won out—because of my Dad!

III

Pump, Pump Pull Away

If there were any great lack at Spring Valley it probably was that of formal physical education. When we went on to school we lacked physical skills taught in city schools. The deficiency showed up more in personality inferiority than in physical fitness. While there were no periods of formal instruction in gymnastics or team sports and no specially purchased uniforms or shoes for the purpose of exercise, we did not lack opportunities to use our muscles. The large roomy playground afforded ample square footage per pupil for active play in the before school period, recess play, and the noon hour. The most popular game was some form of ball game. Batting up flies was a favorite, adapting readily to a small number of participants of varying ability. Younger children played what we called "Norwegian Ball". Why it was so-called, I do not know, but it most closely resembled the ball game "One Old Cat". The youngest beginners, particularly, girls, were allowed to play as "Funny man", meaning that an older child batted for him and the "funny man" merely ran to base, immune to being tagged out. Games particularly popular with the girls and beginners, but sometimes played by the entire school, were "Too Late for Supper", "Drop the Handkerchief", "London Bridge", "The Farmer in the Dell", "Red Light", "New Orleans", and plain old "Hide and Seek", when the call "Olly, olly ocks and free!" could be heard by a person "home free". Greatly enjoyed was the teacher who took time to join in the games. Sometimes, too, this was done out of necessity when friction occurred on the playground as evidenced by undue tattling. "Pump, Pump Pull Away" was always a favorite engaged in by the whole student body, with little ones given a handicap. "Pump, pump pull away, if you don't run I'll pull you away", called out by the person chosen to be it, was a demand to run for the opposite base, with those captured joining him in the next pursuit until finally all were caught. Then the game started all over again. On rare

31

occasions when enthusiasm wore out we would all join hands to play "Crack the Whip". This was not very popular, however, as you would not question had you ever been on the wrong end of "Crack the Whip"!

Play was not always organized. Whole noon hours were spent by the boys' drowning out squirrels (of the striped variety, and often erroneously referred to as striped gophers), the girls ringed around to watch the excitement. Wesley and Earl Swenson were especially adept at this "sport". Being practical farm children, the squirrel was regarded as a menace to crop production, so there were few qualms as to the cruelty of the sport. Water was poured into the squirrel hole, while boys stood ready to club the animal with a bat when he emerged to avoid the fate of drowning. At times the sport was prolonged by giving him an opportunity to escape and disappear down a second hole, when the process was repeated. I can still see the doused squirrel, hair slicked down with water, frightened eyes searching frantically for an avenue of escape, and know the pangs of compassion for him—the momentary aversion for the meanness of the boys!

At times special permission was given for noon hour play beyond the limits of the school grounds, most often in a neighboring pasture. All winter long one year we went en masse to slide on the ice of a frozen pond, removing our rubber overshoes to slide more aptly on leather soles. Our teacher obliged by ringing a warning bell before the final bell calling the afternoon session.

Lax rules one year permitted us to enjoy sliding down a straw stack built over a straw shed. Throughout all my years at Spring Valley I recall no instance of questionable play, or of action taken to correct such play, but in the confines of the straw shed there was perhaps a hint of this. Being too young for interest, I seem to remember some sort of pairing off, whispered conversation and suggestive laughter, but we were remarkably free from the seamy side of life. The most bizarre of punishments meted out by a teacher was the washing out with soap of the mouth of an offender who had dared to mouth foul language.

For the most part we were free, free, FREE! Yet we rarely abused our freedom. What we lacked in quality of physical training was made up for in quantity. Added to the long periods of playground play was the daily walk to and from school through sunshine and rain, sleet and snow. Raincoats for children were unheard of and the lack was made up by additional layers. Standard equipment in the muddy season were four buckle boots, whether hot or cold. They were very necessary as roads were all mud with no gravel or sand whatever, grading was minimal, and in places during the spring thaw water entirely crossed the road. In spite of the boots, stockings on the insides of knees were often black at the end of the day. I remember mud at times oozing with suction of a force to almost part the wearer from the boot, and the weight of mud so thick as to weight every step of the way. In my years as a beginner I wore "overshoes" of a cloth construction, their "waterproofing" of dubious quality. These were low, one or two buckle affairs. To augment their lack of height "leggings" were added as insulation against the cold and a measure of protection against splashed water. I have dim memories of anguish at mastering the multitudinous buttons of those over the knee accessories, often with the aid of a button hook. Other memories of the walk to school include the bluebird on the fence post and also the spring meadow lark, the spotting of a spring crocus in the prairie grass, a shiny yellow marigold along a damp roadside, of "rubber ice" in winter, and, also in winter, of the various shapes and forms of sea foam mounds of snow whipped up by winds along the fence row.

Country boys often ran a trap line along the creek banks. Teachers were sometimes cajoled into giving permission to check the traps during the noon hour, the ploy being the elimination of hours of suffering for a trapped animal. Returning from such a foray on a certain noon hour, odors upon their clothing rendered them unfit for the schoolroom, and they were sent home for a change of clothes which had come in contact with a trapped civit cat. That episode put an end to noon hour trapping.

An occasional winter noon hour was deemed unfit for outdoor play even for hardy country stock, though even then we were sent out to run around the schoolhouse three times for fresh air and exercise. On these days games of the parlor variety were played from our desks. "Spin the Platter", "Numbers", and "Rag Tag" were among the favorites though the latter sometimes became a bit dangerous for such confined quarters. Blackboard games such as "Tick, Tack, Toe," and another version of numbers were also enjoyed, as was also, of all things, playing school!

Climaxing the school day at Spring Valley, interspersed as it was with a fifteen minute morning and afternoon recess, and a full hour noon of cessation from classroom activity, was the walk home from school. Abundant physical activity counteracted the great void of "Physical Education" or "Physical Training", for, in most every instance, it was a walk, and not a ride. Few farmers took the time to hitch up a team of horses to transport a child to or from school. Distance varied for youngsters, but most lived the better part of a mile from school, some more than a mile. How much natural energy we must have worn away, and what wonderful therapy that walk home must have been after a day with books. Waiting for most of us upon our return home were also a few outdoor chores. Mine was the assignment to fill the cob box beside the kitchen range. First, though, was the routine task of changing from school clothes to play clothes. Washing facilities being rather sketchy, and drying a very real problem in mid-winter, clothes were stretched out as far as possible between wash days. Childlike, we were wont to dawdle at getting changed and out to do our chores. A must was the perusal of the "funnies" from the daily paper. I well remember my mother's aggravation at our having to "swat down to read the comics" before getting out. At best they were considered worthless reading, but undaunted we purused the adventures of Ella Cinders, shuddered at the horrors of a mystery in which an Airedale dog figured prominently (probably the "Ben Webster" strip), chuckled over "Boarding House" and "Maggie and Jiggs". Having been instructed both at home and at Sunday School that even the most innocent sounding slang expressions were actually corruptions of the names of the Deity, and thereby a violation of the second of the Ten Commandments, our conscience did not permit us to even silently read such words when they appeared in the comics. We solved the problem by skipping over them and did not allow their presence to deter our enjoyment of the humor. There was no leniency, however, when we protested doing those chores in the dusky shadows of evening which in winter settled down so early. Those seven bushel baskets of cobs were mine to fill and transport to the kitchen via a little red wagon every evening and every evening. The cob pile being out-of-doors, snow sifted into it and froze the cobs tightly. Thus it was no easy task to loosen enough cobs to fill a basket. To achieve dry cobs I tunneled into the pile. As winter wore on this became a virtual cave, the dark recesses of which my imagination filled with all sorts of terrors, but I never learned to get out quickly after school to do the task by daylight. Looking back, it must have kept a homemaker busy to keep firing not only the kitchen range, but also a room heater in the next room as the only source of warmth and cooking energy. She well needed at least a portion of the fuel brought to the house by helping hands.

IV

A Distinguished Guest

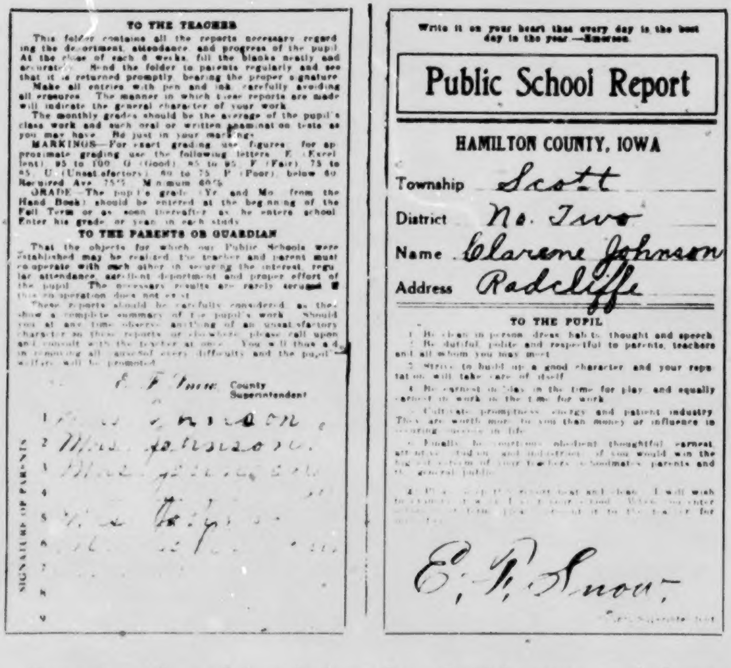
Few and far between were the adult visitors at sessions of school at Spring Valley. There were infrequent visits from some child's mother, sometimes accompanied by a younger brother or sister. Pupils themselves sometimes brought a younger brother or sister to visit for an entire day. Whether or not this pleased the teacher was never considered. It might be said that at that point in history no country school teacher ever considered herself to have a voice in the matter. I remember bringing my younger brother with me for several successive days while my mother worked in the fields to bring in the crop; but I also remember that it was my responsibility to keep him quiet during schooltime. It was not until I became a grade school teacher myself, when the practice of visiting younger children was still acceptable, that I considered that we might have been imposing on the teacher's kindness that particular fall.

At sometime in the course of each school year at Spring Valley there was bound to be a surprise visit from a most distinguished guest—the county superintendent. From the moment he entered the schoolroom we of the student body were filled with awe and respect, putting our best foot forward, and sensing that somehow, not only our performance as pupils, but also the teacher's control of the classroom was being judged.

At that time the county superintendent of schools held a responsible position. His task was to supervise all the schools of the county, hold annual "teacher's institutes" attended by every teacher (with the resultant day of vacation for the pupils), supply, correct, and grade all county examination papers, and annually conduct the ceremony of eighth grade graduation, awarding diplomas to each eighth grade "graduate".

Our particular visiting county superintendent stressed good penmanship. It was the day of "ovals and push pulls". When he stepped to the blackboard to give demonstrations all eyes in the room were riveted to his piece of chalk. Not a sound was to be heard save the rhythmic flow of chalk up and down, or round and round. The results of his efforts were such perfect examples of free arm penmanship that not even a teacher could hope to equal them. Our rapt attention was not due to an intense interest in penmanship—our particular county superintendent was armless!

The County Superintendent of Hamilton County in the latter days of Spring Valley was Superintendent E. F. Snow, the armless educator of Webster City, Iowa. MacKinlay Kantor, notable Iowa author, considered him worthy of note in at least a couple of his writings. His penmanship demonstration was followed up with the presentation of a box of very special pencils to the teacher, the pencils to be awarded to pupils who successfully executed the free arm push pulls and ovals. I can still see the pencils, a common lead pencil of a sort of tile red, but with a diagonal honeycomb design etched on the surface. They were a real incentive to perfect penmanship, but I think our teacher rewarded effort as well as perfection, for I believe we all



TO THE TEACHER

This folder contains all the reports necessary regarding the deportment, attendance, and progress of the pupil. At the close of each 6 weeks, fill the blanks neatly and accurately. Send the folder to parents regularly and see that it is returned promptly, bearing the proper signature.

Make all entries with pen and ink, carefully avoiding all erasures. The manner in which these reports are made will indicate the general character of your work.

The monthly grades should be the average of the pupil's class work and such oral or written examination tests as you may have. Be just in your markings.

MARKINGS—For exact grading use figures; for approximate grading use the following letters: E (Excellent) 95 to 100; G (Good) 85 to 95; F (Fair) 75 to 85; U (Unsatisfactory) 60 to 75; P (Poor) below 60. Required Ave. 75%. Minimum 60%.

GRADE—The pupil's grade (Yr. and Mo. from the Hand Book) should be entered at the beginning of the Fall Term or as soon thereafter as he enters school. Enter his grade or year in each study.

TO THE PARENTS OR GUARDIAN

That the objects for which our Public Schools were established may be realized, the teacher and parent must co-operate with each other in securing the interest, regular attendance, excellent deportment and proper effort of the pupil.

E. F. Snow County Superintendent

SIGNATURE OF PARENTS

1 Mrs. Johnson
2 Mrs. Johnson
3 Mrs. Johnson
4
5
6
7
8
9

Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year.—Emerson.

Public School Report

HAMILTON COUNTY, IOWA

Township Scott

District No. Two

Name Clarence Johnson

Address Radcliffe

TO THE PUPIL

E. F. Snow

Report card used just before the school became an independent school, there after using the name of Spring Valley.

eventually received a pencil.

A balding, affable man, medium of height, not quite stout, Supt. Snow bore an aura of dignity. The stiffly starched white dress shirt, black tie, and black business suit, along with the wide-brimmed black hat always in evidence, no doubt conveyed an illusion of the aristocrat. Children of the rural school were accustomed to the every day look of the farmer clad in denim blue bib overalls and blue chambray shirts.

The disarming smile which always enwreathed his visage quickly dispelled any childhood qualms. He bore with equanimity the pertinent questioning of the very young whose curiosity caused them to forget their manners. While older children hung their heads in shocked silence, he patiently bantered back a casual reply to the occasional query as to what had happened to his arms.

A true educator, each school child was made to feel that his progress in school was of special importance to the county superintendent, and that the child was special as an individual. Superintendent Snow's annual visit inspired us with a desire to excel. His handsome signature graced eighth grade diplomas and special attendance award certificates. I number my own eighth grade diploma among my treasured possessions, because it bears the beautiful signature of an armless person!

* * * * * *

(Supt. Snow wore a band at the base of what was left of his arm, having lost both arms just above the elbow in childhood. His penmanship was accomplished with a piece of chalk or a pencil inserted in the band.)

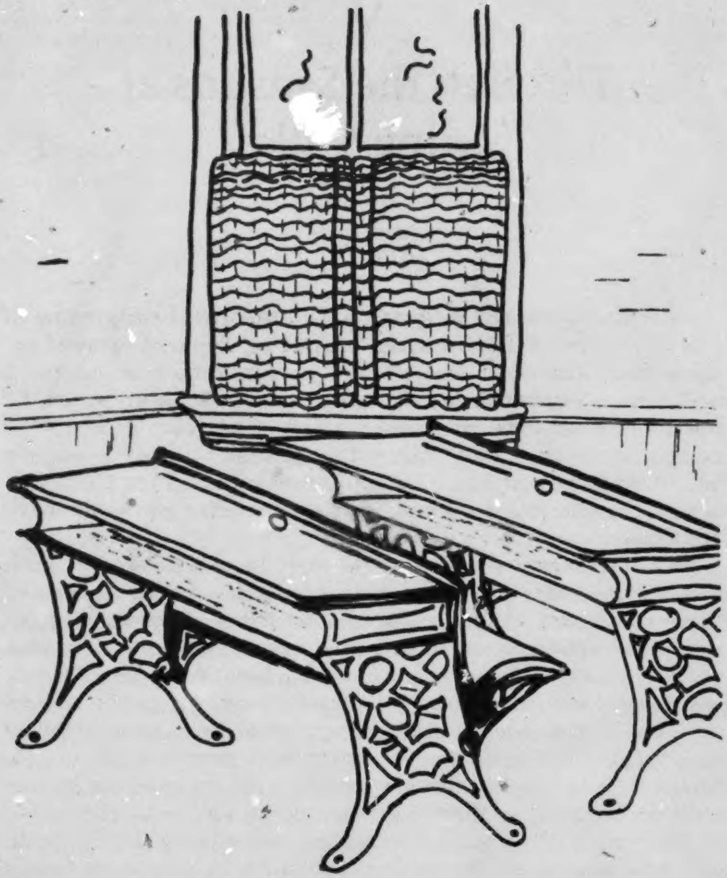
V

Through the Seasons at Spring Valley

As everywhere, fall at Spring Valley marked the beginning of a new school year. For some reason, during the eight years of my elementary education, a new school year meant a new teacher. I do not recall having the same teacher for any two year period. Of one thing I am sure, each teacher left of her own accord. The reason was more likely than not to be that of moving on to a better teaching position, or to further education. Thus there was always the excitement of meeting a new teacher on the first day of school.

As September drew near I was wont to count the days until school should start as school days were always a joy to me and there was a sort of aura about that first day of school. Getting ready for school often meant new school shoes, a few nice clothes, a new tablet, new pencils, and, best of all, new crayons which we were cautioned not to break! Years later, in a college art class, I was to learn that crayons could be used to a better advantage if the protective wrapper were removed, the crayon broken into a couple short pieces and used on the side rather than the point. Then there were new textbooks to be purchased at the local drug store. The drug store possessed a list by grade for rural schools of the county. For some reason each family bought new books for a first child, then passed them down to succeeding siblings. There was no outlet for either the buying or selling of used books and apparently school patrons felt it more simple to save textbooks for younger family members rather than to find a buyer, and then another year to locate used books for a younger child. Since I had an older brother, my textbooks were never new, but rather brought down from the attic and dusted off.

The first day of school found us skipping down the road at an especially early hour. We were eager to choose a desk of our liking, choose a seat mate if necessary, sharpen the new pencils (I can still smell the woody aroma of a freshly sharpened new



pencil on the first day of school) and, best of all, meet fellow school mates whom we may not have seen since school let out in the spring, or at least not since the Fourth of July.

The schoolroom was bright and clean. Freshly laundered white barred marquisette sash curtains hung at the newly washed windows, the panes winking in the brilliant sunshine of a September morn. Some years the walls may have had a fresh coat of paint. The grass in the schoolyard that had been allowed to go to seed in the summer months was freshly cut with a hay mower. Quite possibly the grass had been raked up and used as hay. All these tasks were the responsibility of a director and done by him personally, or with the aid of his wife. It was also his duty to see that the coal shed was well filled with both corn cobs and coal, the cobs to quickly start a fire and to take off the chill on the first cool autumn days, and the coal to more effectively heat the room throughout the winter months.

Often the first weeks of school were uncomfortably warm. There were days when a hot wind blew at such a gale that it was necessary to work with windows closed to keep track of lesson papers. Until the first hard frost flies were also a real nuisance. When new, single desks were installed, they were equipped with ink wells. Transferring ink from bottle to well was such a messy job that the wells usually remained empty. When flies pestered too much we became skillful at catching them and depositing them alive in the ink well. At day's end the ink well in many a desk was alive with the buzzing of trapped flies.

When the schoolroom became unbearably hot and stuffy, there was one sure way to gain relief—an excursion to the outhouse. Permission to "leave the room" was almost never denied, but in balmy weather there were frequent admonitions for having stayed out too long. At times this may have been due to the diversion of the outdated "wish book", standard equipment in every such facility. The outhouse was the only facility at Spring Valley, as the schoolhouse had neither running water nor plumbing of any kind. Obviously, the teacher found herself bothered with fewer requests in the winter season, and certainly no loitering.

In hot weather, the level in the water fountain receded at a greater pace, especially in the afternoon. When it was found to be empty, two pupils were allowed to go after water. What a joy this was in nice weather. Many were the volunteers then but this willingness to serve somehow diminished in winter.

The school's water supply was derived from a spring which had been developed into a flowing well at the bottom of the hill. It was not located, in fact, on the schoolground but in the pasture of the adjoining farm. In dry seasons the flow of water was diminished to a mere trickle, but in warm weather we didn't mind the long wait to fill the bucket. Since it took two of us to carry the filled pail we always had company, and the pools of water around the spring made for endless fascination. Slender boards were laid down across the mud, making it possible to reach the spring with dry feet, but, exuberant children that we were, we often slipped off these. A low concrete stock tank was also at the site. Nothing is so good for hovering over as a stock tank on a hot day. Trailing ones fingers through cool water was

41

refreshing. Little water bugs darted over its surface and thick moss covered the sides of the tank in shades varying from jewel-like emerald green to an earthy yellow ochre. The schoolyard fence offered neither gate nor style. It occurs to me now that it must have been with some difficulty that we managed to climb over the fence with a filled pail of water, but the spring on the other side was our only source of water supply. The school, in fact, owed its charming name to this spring in the valley.

Early fall school days coincided with watermelon season. A nearby farmer, Paul Comfort, surprised Spring Valley one year by loading a number of melons in a farm wagon and bringing them to the school during the noon hour. With his pen knife, he quartered the melons, handed them out to the various pupils, and the remainder of the noon hour was spent devouring the sweet, juicy chunks of melon in the time-honored way—no utensils, no plates, no table. Leaning slightly forward, excess juices dripped to the ground but there was no avoiding the trickles down the forearm, the stickiness of it staying with us for the day, what with wash water being at such a premium and hot water non-existent. The melons, however, were a real treat, the farmer's generosity greatly appreciated, and he was duly thanked. At that time the Comfort children had not as yet started to school. The proximity of the school premises to his farm no doubt prompted them to think of us as the recipient of a portion of his abundant melon crop. There must be at least fourteen or fifteen former Spring Valley pupils who remember this unusual treat. Remembering the family today, I can visualize their beautiful garden, and particularly their flower garden. They had transformed what had been a drab, grassless, farm "houseyard" into a bower of bloom right up to the kitchen door.

The early weeks of school were broken by two special days. One was "teacher's institute" at the county seat when pupils were given a day of vacation while the teacher gained new insights. The other was "children's day" at the Hamilton County Fair. School was always let out for this day when school children were admitted to the fair without admission. As I remember, our family almost always did attend the fair, as did large numbers of families with school children throughout the county. Most of us didn't miss an exhibit—from the prize calves to the horticulture displays. My favorite was the 4-H exhibits of girl's rooms. This was just before the Great Depression, but still it was not an age of affluence. Remembering those exhibits, I think there was little money for bedroom furnishings, or at least beyond the parent's room ("master bedroom" was not as yet a familiar term). Most attractive vanities had been constructed from orange crates, a ruffled skirt of a gay print camouflaging them, though they had been made smooth by several coats of paint. Then, as now, mirrors from the attic had been resurrected. Nail kegs formed the base of the vanity bench. The hand braided or crocheted rag rug graced most every room. Apple green was the prevailing popular color of the era.

Of course, the midway was a never-ending source of amusement. It usually was enjoyed with a schoolmate until our money ran out, which didn't take long as none of us had much.

The hot days of fall were relieved by cool fall mornings and evenings. Reluctant to set up the heater in the "other" room until really necessary, there was much family togetherness around the kitchen table, absorbing the cozy warmth of the kitchen range. Lessons were done at the kitchen table, letters written, and farm accounts kept at the same table, though the accounts did not take up much time then. The close of the day was the only time for the farmer to read the daily paper. One fall my mother took up the practice of reading aloud to the family the biography of a statesman on these cool fall evenings. Snacks of fresh coconut scooped from the shell come to mind and the memories of those evenings of family enjoyment of reading aloud are among the pleasantest. Family devotions, too, were conducted around the kitchen table, just before bedtime. Somewhere along about late October or November, we were granted a long two-week vacation, called "corn husking vacation". Before the days of mechanization, bringing in the corn crop was a long drawn out process involving the whole family. Farm wives and older children joined the farmer in long walks up and down the corn rows, snapping off the ears from the stalks, peeling off the husks with a specially designed hook worn around the wrist, then tossing it into the wooden farm wagon-wooden wheeled, too-upon which a high wooden extension had been added to the far side. The extension was called a bang-board. Walking home from school at near dusk, the crisp, cool fall air rhythmically punctuated with the "bang, bang" of corn thrown against the bang board in field after field is a vivid memory of Spring Valley in late fall. At some point in the fall schools in rural communities, (both town and country) throughout the state allotted the historic corn husking vacation. Its purpose was to avert long, large scale absences of older children when their assistance was so greatly needed. This "vacation" was one of long, fatiguing

43

days for the family. The horse drawn wagons went to the field as soon as daylight permitted, returning to the farmstead intermittently to elevate the golden ears into the crib. The day's wagon forays ceased only when dusk settled in too thickly for tired eyes to distinguish the corn, the day broken only by the noon meal affording both beasts of burden and man a brief respite and renewal of energy. Husking corn made for sore hands, and I remember my mother's consideration in allowing the men to eat without removing their high rubber boots for the noon meal, eliminating the unfastening and fastening of harshly cold metal buckles. Though they had been duly cleaned at the foot scraper, the floor couldn't have escaped a certain amount of tracking in, but no sacrifice was too great when bringing in the crop.

Hired men, usually young, robust, and filled with vitality, often vied with each other for speed in picking corn. On the first day too much speed involved certain hazards. Many a painfully sprained wrist slowed the process for several days thereafter, and the experienced farmer knew enough to take it a little easy in the beginning, working up to a faster rhythm as the days of harvest added up. Every husker, man, woman, or child, soon developed a rhythmic pattern in snapping off the ears, hooking off the husk, and tossing the ear high into the wagon in a single motion.

Sprained wrists notwithstanding, the amount of corn one could husk in a day became a point of pride, and there evolved corn husking contests with an annual state and national corn husking champion named. Somewhere, past corn husking champions of the twenties and early thirties must still be living, the glories of their achievement dimmed by passing years and mechanization.

Spring Valley memories of corn husking vacation take me back to days of "sitting" with my younger brother, Curtis, doing up the morning's housework, and following my mother's instructions for dinner preparation while she went to the field along with my father, an older brother, and occasionally, a "hired man". Often she would leave three or four pumpkin pies in the oven, the baking of which I was to supervise. "Supervising" entailed regular firing of the kitchen range as well as timing the pies. I have no recollection of my record of perfection or imperfection, but so long as they were not burned I'm sure they were readily consumed. One thing that was never in short supply during corn husking was an appetite. Cholesterol was yet to be discovered, and few and far between were those concerned about stepping on the scales.

In mild weather I was sometimes permitted to bring Curtis out to the field, either walking across the pasture to the wagons easily located by the casual ear or by having the pleasure of the jouncing ride in an empty wagon returning to the field. Once in the field we usually walked along, playing among the dry, rattling stalks, but sometimes we were allowed to ride in a corner of the wagon, safe from the tossed ears. A nostalgic memory is the moist, greenish, though fully ripe, fragrance of freshly picked corn that pervaded the wagon. A real treat was the loan of a hook to experiment with the technique of corn husking. Two adults often worked together with one wagon, each taking a couple rows. As harvesting progressed, horses became almost automatic in pulling a short distance, stopping for an interval, then pulling, but often the farmer's voice could be heard to call out "Whoa", "Get Up", "Whoa!" Most undesirable was the husking of the ears of golden grain from the "down" row resulting from "breaking out" a new land, land being the term used for the unit of rows husked in rotation. A given field was broken up into "lands" for the sake of practicality. Many a farmer's back ached at night from having stooped to pick the loathed "down rows", but almost not a single ear was left in the fields in the days of Spring Valley; nor was it shelled off the cob to any extent. The latter was considered a wasteful problem when the first mechanical corn pickers were put into use. Unforeseen was the day when almost all corn would be combined and brought in as loads of shelled corn.

Returning from the fields tired and hungry, there were still the loads to be elevated into the crib. Horses were unhitched from the wagons and then hitched to the elevator shaft for their last job of the day. Heads bent to pull, they walked round and round, a system of pulleys and tumbling rods setting in motion the elevating apparatus. The sound of corn being elevated at the supper hour still rings in my ears. Sometimes allowed to watch, we were cautioned to keep a distance, but in one instance the admonition was unheeded with a resultant narrow escape. The tied belt on my coat swung into a gear low on the elevator jack which was used to raise the wagon box. I tried unsuccessfully to free it, and remember a sudden moment of horror at being drawn toward the slowly turning gears just as my father noticed my plight. A sharp command to the horses stopped the machine at once, and the belt was worked loose. Even horse powered farm machinery had some potential for danger.

Along with field work there were always chores to be done, usually by artificial light in corn husking season. Kerosene

45

lanterns were much in use at the Spring Valley community, though our farm home was illuminated electrically, with the out buildings only in a minimum way. Often there were from twelve to twenty cows to be milked, hogs to be fed, horses to be bedded down, fed, and watered, and poultry to be cared for.

For the homemaker corn husking season meant a continual round of mending, especially of "husking mittens". The rough corn quickly wore holes in layered flannel, and I can still see the stacks of mittens mended by my mother in the evenings. Overalls, too, suffered the same fate as the gloves, and patch after patch was applied by nimble fingers, yet fingers sometimes sore from a day in the field. A couple times a week bread sponge had to be "set", a last chore at bedtime. There being no automatic heat, houses cooled down at night. To counteract the chilling the rising sponge was wrapped first in a clean white dish towel, and then often in a sheepskin coat for insulation. If the sponge were especially lively, upon unwrapping in the morning it sometimes was found to have overflown out over the surface of the towel. The sound of the vigorous beating of sponge in the kitchen below is a sleepy, bedtime memory of childhood.

Bringing in the last wagon load of corn called for a celebration. In our family it was a custom to invite a family of relatives for oyster stew in jubilant observance of having successfully garnered the crop. If weather had been cooperative, this occurred before Thanksgiving, but often corn picking dragged on into December. In such a year work seemed necessary even on Thanksgiving Day.

Rural school youngsters loved all the special days of the year. Hallowe'en didn't necessarily mean a party, but we felt excitement at tracing and cutting black cats, witches, and jack-o-lanterns with which to decorate the school room. A common practice early in the century was the decorating of schoolroom windows with paper cutouts and a point of interest on a drive through the country was to view the displays at the different school houses. Later this was considered to be a poor practice, since it was not something that was done on the windows of the child's home. One can imagine the extra work it made for the teacher, in that, upon removal, paper and paste had to be scraped from the window.

Conversation at recess and at noon lunch period centered around legends of Hallowe'en antics of the young, as passed down from father to son. From time immemorial, to the consternation of the older generation, Hallowe'en has been a recognized time of mild vandalism. Only when it sometimes reached severely damaging proportions were the youthful goblins reprimanded if found out.

One notable Hallowe'en at Spring Valley, a very generous and social minded school patron family, the Elmer Mortvedts, invited the entire school district to their home for a Hallowe'en party. Whole families were in attendance, all the way from babies to parents. Games of a traditional Hallowe'en type were provided for every age group—bobbing for apples, eating marshmallows from a string, cracker eating race, paper Jack-o-lantern hunt, and the like—with prizes for the winners, but there was also free time to socialize. Since the night was clear and temperate, we children had a fine night of hide and seek about the farmstead. A delicious Hallowe'en lunch was served to all. It was a fine gesture of neighborhood togetherness, and a Hallowe'en to be remembered at Spring Valley.

Party or not, there were always handsomely carved jack-o-lanterns at every farm home where there were children. At our home we would light them and set them in a front window. Few were the passersby to see them, as about the only night time traveler over our country road was a neighbor lad in the car age. Yes, even in the twenties cars and driving to town at night were a teen age predilection. The road was pure Hamilton County loam. After a rain it was left smooth and clear, but the young fellow was sure to come plowing through before it dried, leaving deep corduroy ruts zig-zagging down the road. Dried by wind and sun these were hazardous to motoring for days to come, there being no regular maintenance of country roads. The only attention they received was the annual dragging each farmer gave them to "work off his poll tax".

Another remembered Hallowe'en party was a girls' 4-H party. 4-H broadened our horizons a bit in that our club was made up of girls from several school districts, or perhaps from all of Scott Township. At any rate, for this particular party a Spring Valley school friend, Ordella Swenson, and I were privileged to ride to the party a few miles over with our leader, Mable Brinton, and then to stay the night in her home. Her home had a bathroom, and it was one of the few times that I visited in a home with such modern facilities throughout my years at Spring Valley. The party itself was a bit of an introduction to "teen years", though the term "teen-ager" was not yet heard. As an informal bit of socializing, we gathered around the piano to sing popular tunes, among them "Carolina Moon", and "Springtime in the Rockies", thus sparking adolescent interest in "popular" music.

Radio was just beginning to come into its own in the late twenties. More and more families acquired radios equipped with loud speakers, making it feasible to listen without the restricted encumbrance of headsets of earphones. Early in the twenties my father constructed a crystal radio set, the first radio in our immediate community. He worked at this after the chores were done in the evenings, in late fall and winter. His aerial was a very long wire stretching from the house to the corn crib. For some reason it entered the house at an upper story window, perhaps the better to catch the waves. Possibly, too, the window had to be open slightly, which would have caused a draft in the heated lower rooms. I shall always remember the evening my father dashed downstairs in jubilant elation—"Mattie, come here, quick," he called from the stair landing. "I've got something on the crystal set!" Sensing the wonder of the moment, Merlin and I jumped up from our play to race up to the seed corn room, followed less enthusiastically by Mother, but unmindful of her admonition that we might catch colds. With exultance, Dad divided the head set of earphones in order that two at a time might hear the voice that came somewhat faintly, but yet distinctly, over the air waves. I remember music and the announcer proclaiming the call letters of the station in Schennectady, New York. All along Mother had taken a dim view of Dad's radio interest. Her main concern of the moment was the sharp chill of the cold upper room, but she had to marvel, in spite of herself, at the success of the new invention. Dad, who always looked ahead to progress with optimism, impressed upon us that we were at the brink of a wonderful new age. He predicted the advent of numerous radio broadcasting stations throughout the country. "Just think", he said, with a sparkle in his eye, "soon everyone, everywhere, will be able to hear news almost as soon as it happens. There's no end to the possibilities."

Dad improved upon that first set, gaining experience from constructing radios for relatives. A big improvement was the advent of tubes, much stronger than the tiny crystal assemblage, a better condenser, and a black instrument panel which must have been made of bakelite or a similar substance. Dad ordered his materials from the mail order catalogs found in every farm home. On Sunday afternoons we had occasional visitors for the express purpose of "listening to the radio" via the earphones. Our first loud speaker was an improvisation. A "morning glory" speaker from an old "gramaphone" was machined to hold a section of the head set, and we were delighted at the amplification allowing us all to listen at the same time. To my mother, however, the radio was mostly an intrusion into the peace and quiet of our home, so the radio did not play incessantly. Nevertheless it did perform an important service—every morning at ten o'clock, she faithfully "listened to the market", reporting to Dad when he came in for the noon meal. Selling farm produce at the right time, whether it be a few hogs, a calf or two, or the entire year's crop of corn or oats made the difference of a good profit or just getting by for another year.

There was always Thanksgiving vacation at Spring Valley, but usually just the customary two days. The holiday itself was observed with worship service at church in the morning and a bountiful meal shared with a family of relatives if it could be arranged. At this season the Hallowe'en art on the windows of Spring Valley was replaced with turkeys and Pilgrims. We memorized Lydia Marie Child's "Thanksgiving Day":[6]

"Over the river and through the wood,
To grandfather's house we go;
The horse knows the way
To carry the sleigh
Through the white and drifted snow.

"Over the river and through the wood—
Now grandmother's cap I spy!
Hurrah for the fun!
Is the pudding done?
Hurrah for the pumpkin pie!

Thanksgiving Day did not always bring snow, or at least not to the extent that roads became impassable, but we well knew the experience of the horse drawn sleigh, though it was generally the less romantic bobsled—an ordinary farm wagon with sled runners replacing the wheels. I recall winter visits to neighboring relatives in such a conveyance. Clean straw in the bottom of the wagon box offered some insulation for the cold ride and for the more tender there were warmed flat irons or bricks for the feet. We would snuggle down under a fur robe with only our faces exposed to wintry blasts. Fur robes were a necessity in those days and did a pretty good job of keeping in body heat. Where were these cumbersome articles stored? Often in a heap on the floor of the kitchen corner where "everyday" wraps were hung. We children sometimes played on the soft, shiny black heap on winter evenings. The pungent smell of cured horsehair still comes to my memory upon thought of it.

Turkey for the average family of Spring Valley was only a myth. Most of us had not even tasted turkey. Tom Tjernagel's, our neighbors to the south, annually raised a small flock of turkeys, about a dozen in number. They were allowed to roam the farm yard, as was customary with all poultry at that time. As we passed on our way to school we delighted in calling out, "Gobble, gobble!". Invariably the flock would respond in unison. I doubt that turkey graced even the Tjernagel table on Thanksgiving Day. Duck was the treat for us, as we raised mallard ducks, sometimes to the amount of a hundred or more. When the market seemed just right, these were dressed and shipped to Chicago packed in barrels. Ducks were hand picked dry to preserve the feathers and down for stuffing pillows, a tedious and messy task as the bits of down tended to become air borne and float about the room. After a day of dressing ducks, one might even find bits of down or feather in most any room of the house, though the operation itself had been confined to the basement where some measure of warmth had been gained from an old laundry stove.

At Spring Valley, needless to say, the holiday of the year was Christmas, with New Year's Day as an anti-climax. Soon after Thanksgiving, Thanksgiving decorations were discarded and Christmas trees, miniature Santa Claus cut-outs, stars, and bells appeared. The big event was the school Christmas program. Most everyone was assigned a "piece" to speak. The brighter ones memorized theirs at once, "wearing it out", as the saying goes, by their constant repetitions at play both at school and at home. Others sometimes had to have prompting even on the big day. Whether having learned it or not, there was always the pupil who became afflicted with stage fright, all memory blocked of that which he had learned. A real Christmas tree occupied a prominent place at the front of the schoolroom, lending an aroma of pine mixed with candle tallow, for the tree was lit with real candles set in little clip-on holders. This was also the case in our homes. Coming across a box of partly used Christmas candles in mid-summer, the tallow fragrance turned one back in nostalgia to Christmas. Now the twisted, pastel tapers of a small size still conjure up on sight the same nostalgia for the Christmas of childhood. Because of lack of lighting, the Christmas program was held in the afternoon and was attended by mothers and pre-school children. The entire school usually sang a favorite, "Jingle Bells". Its harmony was dubious, but enthusiasm abounded. Now and then a pupil endeavored to sing a solo or a duet. Whether endowed with the abilities of vocalization or not, everyone participated and it was an opportunity to perform for an audience. I remember in particular a seventh grade boy, singing bashfully along with a more forward classmate, in an off-key sort of bass voice just beginning to "change":

"Dashing thro' the snow
In a one horse open sleigh
O'er the fields we go,
Laughing all the way;
Bells on bobtail ring,
Making spirits bright,
What fun it is to ride and sing
A sleighing song tonight!

"Jingle, bells! Jingle, bells!
Jingle all the way!
Oh, what fun it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh!

A song often assigned to little children was:

"Up on the house-top reindeer pause,[8]
Out jumps good old Santa Claus;
Down thro' the chimney with lots of toys,
All for the little ones Christmas joys.

"Ho, ho, ho! Who wouldn't go!
Ho, ho, ho! Who wouldn't go!
Up on the house-top, click, click, click,
Down thro' the chimney with good Saint Nick.

There were acrostics spelling Christmas, and usually a "dialogue", or little play, as well as the religious carols. "Silent Night", "O, Little Town of Bethlehem", and "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" were always included. From a "piece", or "recitation", I once had, my memory retains the line, "It is more blessed to give than to receive".

Two Christmas programs of Spring Valley stand out in my mind. These were held at night, and entire families attended. One was at the home of school patrons, the Scott Brinton family. Their home was the elite of the community. It boasted furnace heat and an open room arrangement which might easily accommodate a large crowd. The school teacher that year lived at their home. She was particularly given to staging productions and more is written about our year with "Miss Vivian" in a later

51

chapter. A few of the girls were cast as Christmas fairies, and we were costumed in white gauze fairy costumes fashioned by our mothers according to specification, complete with wings dazzling with edges of silver garlands. We were enthralled—until dress rehearsal when we were confronted with the problem of long winter underwear! Underwear was not only long of leg, but also of sleeve, and it was a one piece "union" suit, considered to be warmer than the two piece variety. Permission from mothers to discard the underwear for the night, nor even for the performance, was not forthcoming. Christmas and severe colds having such close affinity, one can readily understand this reluctance, but in the sleeveless fairy dress it did pose a problem. We did the only thing we could do—slipped out of the upper portion of the union suit, rolling it down to our waists underneath the costume. What lumpy fairies we must have been! We did our part, but I remember anguish at the thought that I might be exhibiting a dangling sleeve.

Another evening Christmas program was held in the schoolhouse, the only illumination, oil lamps brought in for the evening. There was, as usual, the gift exchange accomplished by drawing names, a Christmas tradition that has survived the decades. The teacher, of course, received gifts from every student, usually a handkerchief, but it fell to her lot to also give gifts to each and every child, as well as to provide treats for, not only the school enrollment, but the entire crowd!

The oil lamps and the lighted tree must have presented a beautiful tableau, and it was indeed a treasured experience to have the entire community of Spring Valley gathered there in that traditional setting to celebrate the birth of the Savior. The schoolhouse was very small, however, the room packed with humanity, and there was only one exit. I remember my father's remonstrating afterward at the terrible danger of fire to which we had all been subjected. At the present time I'm sure I should be most uneasy to find myself in such a situation, but still it is a treasured memory of Spring Valley before the days of acute public safety consciousness.

Christmas vacation was always, without question, two weeks long or more. This was a time for enjoying gifts from the school party, helping to get the family home ready for Christmas, program practice at the church, "Santa Claus Day" at some of the neighboring towns where sacks of candy were distributed by a local personage attired in a Santa Claus costume, a trip to the county seat town of Webster City for last minute shopping, and finally Christmas Eve.

In our home Christmas Eve supper was always a bowl of rice with cinnamon, sugar, and milk. Then, unless we were confined to our home with a Christmas cold, the highlight of the evening was the program at the church. In the day before the heated automobile Christmas Eve often found us home with the sniffles, for a five mile drive in a vehicle enclosed only with side curtains with the ever-present worry of "car trouble", was too much to risk. Later in the evening we had our family gift exchange, with the one and only lighting of the candles on the tree. I, in childish exuberance, could never understand Dad's apprehension at the fire hazard. I saw only the exquisite beauty and felt slight annoyance that he could not enjoy it fully with me, but now I marvel that all went well each and every year. Church program or not, we children were required to "speak our piece" and to sing a song or two before the distribution of gifts. I remember a particular Christmas when, very young, I rebelled out of stage fright even for just our family. Mother stood her ground—no gifts until we first observed the true meaning of Christmas in this fashion. She sought to emphasize the gift of the Saviour, but, childlike, the gifts were of most importance to us. Often the tree was set up in the "front room", and early in the evening the large sliding door was opened to "heat it up a bit", with the heating stove located in the dining room. In early years this was a treasure of a hard coal stove, necessitating a refueling only once daily with anthracite, or hard coal. With isinglass sides the glowing coals were always visible and the chrome fenders made wonderful foot warmers to stocking feet half frozen from a walk home from school. Soon after the distribution of "presents", the front room was again closed off as the chill of the winter night settled in. Oyster stew after the gift presentation was a family tradition, and we gathered around the round oak table for this. Then followed nuts and candy. Walnuts were often cracked on the metal stove plate extending out from the heater, using a flat iron as base, and a hammer to do the cracking. Mixed nuts, including the easily shelled English walnuts, were a special Christmas treat, while the ordinary black walnuts harvested from the grove were in evidence throughout the long winter. These were the nuts, too, that went into Christmas fudge. Finally would come the order to "get off to bed", bedtime having been drastically postponed on this special night, but there was church again on Christmas morning. Sometimes Christmas Day was a day spent alone at home with just our own family, but it was always a special day with Dad in the house most of the day, enjoying our new toys and games with us. Other times we enjoyed the company of relatives or a visit away from home with them.

In our home of Scandinavian heritage, the Christmas meal was always "lutefisk and lefse". Making the lefse was an all-family project in preparation for Christmas. On an afternoon when Dad could be inside, Mother would mix the dough by scalding two cups of milk, dropping two tablespoons of lard into the hot milk to melt, then sifting a sifterful of flour (about three and a half cups) and one teaspoon of salt into the lard-milk solution. The mixture was turned onto a floured "molding" board to be worked into a dough stiff enough to roll. Little pieces were then cut off and rolled out with a special rolling pin if one were fortunate enough to possess a lefse rolling pin. Because of the small amount of shortening, the rolling took a great deal of strength and here Dad sometimes took over. Lefse must be rolled very thin and the edges particularly present a problem. Firing the kitchen range to a temperature hot enough to bake the large round sheets was a job for a child, with supervision. Placing the fragile sheets on the surface of the range without tearing them, then smoothing them out to eliminate wrinkles before they became stiffened with baking, was an art in itself, and usually accomplished only with practice each new year. The slat of a roll shade was often pressed into duty as a turning stick, for when little blisters bubbled up the lefse had to be flipped over to bake on the other side. When removed from the stove, it was laid, folded, on a tray to dry, in which condition it would keep almost indefinitely. When desired for a meal, each individual sheet had to be soaked by dipping briefly in a pan of warm water, then laid between clean tea towels. After about twenty minutes it was ready to be spread with butter and sugar, then cut into serving size pieces. For the lutefisk lover, though, the unspread lefse was served. It was sometimes eaten in this manner: spread out on the table before the diner, butter was spread with a knife, lutefisk spooned on along with a scoop of mashed potatoes, the lefse folded over, then the entire piece rolled up into a roll, drawn butter poured into the lutefisk-potato pocket, and eaten as an ice cream cone. This was called "bit-e" (bāt-a), and considered a most delicious morsel of food. I never did acquire a taste for lutefisk, though all the other Norwegian Christmas goodies have become very much a Christmas tradition in my kitchen. I have even mastered the lefse baking on the new type of electric grill, sans the kitchen range.

In the farming community of Spring Valley there was always

"Second Day Christmas", and sometimes even "Third Day Christmas", to celebrate with relatives and friends. One managed to share the festivities with many, and each day would mean either more guests in the home or invitations away from home.

Standing out in memory among holiday visits in early childhood, are the annual dinners at the home of maternal cousins, Martin and Gunhild Christianson, both of whom had immigrated to America directly from Norway. More commonly, it was the parents of relatives or friends who had immigrated. At Gunhild's home Norwegian hospitality was at its best. We were always served a delightful array of Norwegian pastry—krumkake, fatigman bakkels, rosettes, and kringla, along with a sumptuous meal. The "bit-e" is reminiscent of the holiday of a familiar aunt and uncle. Uncle Iver brought the custom from his childhood home, and Aunt Julia learned to bake the lefse and cook the lutefisk. Visits to our paternal grandfather, Grandpa Johnson, who resided with a maiden daughter, are a treasured Christmas memory. There was no tree, but garlands of twisted green and red crepe paper suspended diagonally across the room just below the ceiling announced the holiday spirit. Before departing, each child was individually summoned to a dresser drawer in Grandpa's room, but by Aunt Carrie. Opening the drawer a special gift was lifted out. Devoid of any of the usual trappings, such as wrappings, the breathless moment of opening the drawer provided the delightful joy of anticipation usually experienced upon receiving a Christmas gift. Perhaps the unique presentation accounts for my long memory of these gifts, always something to wear—a scarf, a belt, or perhaps a pair of mittens.

Following Christmas vacation, school at Spring Valley settled down to an absorbing time of learning. The seventh and eighth grade pupils resigned themselves to drill in earnest for forthcoming county exams, the beginners had learned to read a bit, and so could be counted upon to occupy themselves with "seatwork", and the middle grades were busy mastering arithmetic, memorizing spelling words, and reading over at least three times, reading, history, and geography assignments.

Darkness settled in early at that time of year, especially if it were a stormy day. Spring Valley School in all the years of existence had no power source whatever. Thus there was no such thing as snow vacation because of a power outage. Since our legs were the chief source of transportation, a road that drifted closed presented no problems in "keeping school", either. As I write I think of the teacher. What is child's play in the matter of navigating high drifts of snow must have represented one of the real hardships of teaching a country school. A teacher who "boarded and roomed" in our home one year invested in a pair of skis, which I assume were cross country skis.

While the walk home from school was our lot, fair weather or foul, mostly because traversing the distance by any conveyance of the day would have been equally as cold though of shorter exposure, there was compassion in the hearts of our parents. I have memories of a warm cup of cocoa awaiting me when stepping in the door, of help with removing wraps when fingers were numb with cold, and of a pan of cold water in which to plunge frost bitten fingers, the then-approved remedy for them. In the dead of winter when outdoor work was somewhat at a standstill on the farm, Mother sometimes had the evening meal ready to serve when we returned from school, and evening chores were done after the meal. Bedtime snacks were then the rule, at least for the men of the house. A favored snack was milk and crackers. Everyone fixed his own at that point in the day, as Mother's feet had carried her about as far as possible for one day. What a chore to wash the hardened residue in the tumbler from the cracker, milk mixture the following morning! A favorite supper dessert for me was torn bread in a soup bowl saturated with milk, and with sugar and cinnamon sprinkled over all. This dish was equally difficult to wash, but usually was promptly done rather than left until morning, as with those of the evening snack.

Nonetheless, there must have been days of enforced school vacation when severe winter storms chanced to sweep in. I remember one such storm, reducing our electrically lighted home to the dimness of oil lamp illumination. On this certain evening our family enjoyed together the lines of Whittier's "Snowbound",[9] read aloud by Mother in the soft glow of the lamp. It gave us great contentment, the first person experience allowing us to identify with the descriptive lines:

"The sun that brief December day
Rose cheerless over hills of gray,
And, darkly circled, gave at noon
A sadder light than waning moon.
Slow tracing down the thickening sky
Its mute and ominous prophecy,
A portent seeming less than threat,
It sank from sight before it set.
A chill no coat, however stout,

56

Of homespun stuff could quite shut out,
A hard, dull bitterness of cold,
That checked, mid-vein, the circling race
Of life-blood in the sharpened face,
The coming of the snow-storm told.
The wind blew east; we heard the roar
Of Ocean on his wintry shore,
And felt the strong pulse throbbing there
Beat with low rhythm our inland air.

Meanwhile we did our nightly chores-
Brought in the wood from out of doors,
Littered the stalls, and from the mows
Raked down the herd's-grass for the cows:
Heard the horse whinnying for his corn;
And, sharply clashing horn on horn,
Impatient down the stanchion rows
The cattle shake their walnut brows;
While, peering from his early perch
Upon the scaffold's pole of birch,
The cock his crested helmet bent
And down his querulous challenge sent.

Unwarmed by any sunset light
The gray day darkened into night,
A night made hoary with the swarm
And whirl-dance of the blinding storm,
As zigzag, wavering to and fro,
Crossed and recrossed the winged snow:
And ere the early bedtime came
The white drift piled the window-frame,
And through the glass the clothesline posts
Looked in like tall and sheeted ghosts.
So all night long the storm roared on:
The morning broke without a sun;
In tiny spherule traced with lines
Of Nature's geometric signs,
In starry flake, and pellicle,
All day the hoary meteor fell;
And, when the second morning shone,
We looked upon a world unknown,
On nothing we could call our own.
Around the glistening wonder bent
The blue walls of the firmament.

No cloud above, no earth below—
A universe of sky and snow!
The old familiar sights of ours
Took marvelous shapes; strange domes and towers
Rose up where sty or corn-crib stood,
Or garden-wall, or belt of wood;
A smooth white mound the brush-pile showed,
A fenceless drift that once was road;
The bridle-post an old man sat
With loose-flung coat and high cocked hat;
The well-curb had a Chinese roof;
And even the long sweep, high aloof,
In its slant splendor, seemed to tell
Of Pisa's leaning miracle.

—John Greenleaf Whittier

Throughout the school year, but mostly in the spring or fall, because of the basically unheated bedrooms, schoolmates often enjoyed overnight visits in homes of friends. It was problematical to have house guests in mid-winter. Family members often dressed and undressed by relays beside the kitchen stove or a heater in "the other room". Regular bedroom cleaning was also at a minimum in this season as it could be accomplished only by bundling into layers of sweaters. Icy fingers wielding an equally icy dust cloth were not apt to linger over finely polished surfaces—if such surfaces were in evidence. More likely bedroom furnishings were painted "hand-me-downs", much the worse for wear and tear.

Floors were wide pine boards with large dust catching cracks between them. If they had ever seen paint most of it had worn off. The standard "Friday" cleaning of these floors was to wash them with mop and pail. (Weekly cleaning was generally known as "Friday's work". In telephone conversation, one was often heard to ask, "Do you have your "Friday's work" done?) If a homemaker were fortunate she might have floors in a room or two covered with linoleum with perhaps a border of painted boards around the edge. Elite among this type of floor covering was inlaid linoleum. The pattern penetrated through almost to the backing, making for long wearing qualities. The norm, however, was a linoleum that had seen better days, with lines of worn areas marking the floor boards underneath. In the eight room farm home of my childhood, every floor in the house was washed weekly with the exception of the living room which was carpeted with an area rug. Standard size of any rug, whether carpet or linoleum, was "9' x 12' ", so that the fit varied from room to room, with resultant varying strips of exposed painted, or, in the case of the living room, varnished floor boards to dust, polish, or wash. In the winter the floor mopping operation was usually confined to the heated rooms, with only an occasional mopping of the unheated bedrooms left to days when temperatures had moderated a bit. Floors were swept or dusted, but, since dust control was not very efficient, little fluffs of dust curled up in corners were not uncommon. As little time as possible was spent in those parts of the house in winter time, the dash through the frigid stair case made in record time, so for the most part they went unnoticed.

Keeping warm in bed was equally problematical. Replacing sheets were blankets, and often double blankets. "Double" described a blanket that covered the bottom of the bed, its fold tucked in at the foot, and the extra length brought up to form the top covering. Piled on top of this were "comforters", or quilts of the tied variety, usually filled with cotton batting. A luxury comforter was one filled with wool batting. Whatever the filling the quilts were not readily washed because of their great bulk, making it impossible for them to be put through a wringer, if indeed they could be laundered in the washing machine. On coldest nights one had to choose between bearing the terrible weight of numerous such coverings or remaining somewhat chilled, neither condition conducive to a good night's sleep. The double blankets also presented a laundering problem, so in the winter, changing bed linen was not done on a regular basis. Homemakers seized the opportunity for outdoor line drying on the mildest of days to accomplish this task. Family apparel was often dried, or at least finished drying, on a wooden folding clothes dryer set up beside the heater. I can still smell the fresh dampness of clothes brought in partially frozen from the line to be finished off in such a manner. On washday, humidity in the home was at a high level. Under these conditions, then, house guests in the winter were to be avoided. When springtime made the remainder of the house once more liveable, "inviting someone home for an over night stay" was very popular. Accompanying the lunch bucket on such a day was a brown paper sack containing the guest's "nightgown", for the advent of pajamas was yet to come. The hostess child and her guest were the best of friends on the day of the visit and such a bond seemed to carry over into the day following. Host or guest could be counted upon for the firmest of loyalty in an disagreement on such a day!

The walk home from school with one's host or hostess offered a diversion from the usual walk in the other direction. Once arrived, there was usually an after school snack, and then all play was out of doors until the summon to supper was heard. Hosts were usually excused from chores on "company" night. Something special was wont to appear on the supper table for the occasion, usually in the form of cake or some other dessert. The guest was often a shy partaker of the meal, missing the familiar presence of his own family, perhaps just a little homesick at the thought of having to go to bed in a strange home without the parental "goodnight" ritual, and anxiously conscious of the admonition from a mother to have good table manners, clean up his or her plate, and to say "thank you for the supper" when finished. Once in bed, conversation continued in order not to miss a minute's precious time. Once again, however, weariness from the long walk home from school, coupled with outdoor play both at school and at home after school, soon carried the young friends off to the land of nod. A remembered poem which was often memorized at Spring Valley was "Wynken, Blynken and Nod"[10], a Dutch Lullaby, written by Eugene Field:

"Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe—
Sailed on a river of crystal light
Into a sea of dew,
"Where are you going, and what do you wish?"
The old moon asked the three.
"We have come to fish for the herring fish
That live in this beautiful sea;
Nets of silver and gold have we!"
Said Wynken,
Blynken,
And Nod.

The old moon laughed and sang a song,
As they rocked in the wooden shoe;
And the wind that sped them all night long
Ruffled the waves of dew.
The little stars were the herring fish
That lived in that beautiful sea—
"Now cast your nets wherever you wish—
Never afeared are we!
So cried the stars to the fisherman three,

60

Wynken,
Blynken,
And Nod.

All night long their nets they threw
To the stars in the twinkling foam—
Then down from the skies came the wooden shoe,
Bringing the fishermen home;
"Twas all so pretty a sail it seemed
As if it could not be,
And some folk thought 'twas a dream they'd dreamed
Of sailing that beautiful sea—
But I shall name you the fishermen three:
Wynken,
Blynken,
And Nod.

Wynken and Blynken are two little eyes,
And Nod is a little head,
And the wooden shoe that sailed the skies
Is a wee one's trundle-bed;
So shut your eyes while Mother sings
Of wonderful sights that be,
And you shall see the beautiful things
As you rock in the misty sea
Where the old shoe rocked the fishermen three:—
Wynken,
Blynken,
And Nod.

Equating the overnight visit in popularity was the experience of going away to play on a Saturday afternoon. This must have more nearly fit in with a mother's schedule, as it involved only a treat in mid-afternoon. Transportation was never a problem as it was naturally assumed that the invited guest would walk whether the distance was one mile or two. Going to meet the guest and walking back to the home of the hostess was a part of the afternoon. If weather were somewhat inclement, play in the barnloft was a favored pastime. At the Swenson's there was a shed type barn. This particular design boasted a "hayloft" directly on the ground floor, with livestock pens surrounding it. There was, however, a second story "half loft" with endless possibilities for entertainment. Fun loving innovators that they were, Wesley and Earl, had tied a rope swing from a high rafter.

Its length permitted it to be brought almost to the edge of the half loft—almost, but not quite. The thrill was in acquiring the expertise to grab the bag swing as it swung toward one, then, with a firm grip, jump onto the almost out of reach bag for a ride at dizzying heights over the lower loft. An occasional fall was of little consequence except to one's dignity, as soft hay cushioned the floor below.

On such a Saturday afternoon visit from a neighbor boy, I somehow managed to wangle permission to tag after my brother, Merlin, and his visitor, to the hog barn. This barn had a hayloft, but no flooring covered the last couple of feet or so along each edge to allow easy bedding of the hog pens below. The season was the spring of the year. With the boys I leaned over the opening, the better to gaze at newly born litters of pigs housed along with their mothers in the pens below. Mother sows can be most vicious, but we felt smugly safe viewing them from the overhead vantage point. All went well until I attempted to reach across for support on what I supposed to be a straw covered beam. Unfortunately, it proved to be only a clump of straw which had lodged against a beam. With the pressure of my grasp, it was released and straw clump and I made a quick descent to the farrowing pen below. No injury was sustained in the fall, and sensing the danger, I lost no time in scrambling up onto the wooden gate. I leaped over into the sanctuary of the barn alley before the sow could recover from her astonishment enough to fear for her brood and thereby attack me. With good reason, I was strictly lectured by my parents about the fierceness of the maternal instinct of sows, and quite possibly restricted from the barn for the time being. So fierce is the sense of maternal protection among hogs that one was once observed to completely consume a small dog of the size of a rat terrier, to the horror of its owners.

Another form of amusement afforded by the hayloft was the sport of older neighbor boys consisting of shooting pigeons with their rifles. This was especially popular on the long dark evenings of winter. I remember a visit from a band of neighbor boys requesting permission to thin down the pigeon population in our barn. Although my father was of two minds concerning this, he did give them permission, realizing perhaps that the boys needed some outlet for pent up energy in early adolescence. The pigeons were a nuisance in that they infested the barn with lice, and also their habit of nesting on the hay carrier track presented an extra task in haying season, that of cleaning the track. They were pretty birds, however, and the sight of pigeons on the barn roof and the sounds of their gentle cooing was a homey one. Capturing them alive was more to Merlin's liking, and he spent winter evenings studying catalogs advertising the exotic fantailed pigeons. He never did invest, but one spring he captured and retained in a brooder house quite a number of pigeons, feeding them and taming them. When it came time to clean the brooder house for the annual hatch of baby chicks, he was ordered to turn them loose. By this time a pair had mated, nesting on the floor, and squabs had hatched from the eggs. Not knowing what to do about it, my brother opened the door of the building. At day's end, all pigeons had left for greater freedom. To my brother's dismay, he found in the nest the lifeless bodies of the pair of squabs, slain by their parents as the only solution to leaving them behind. It was their calculated alternative to the problem of leaving their babies unattended!

Friday afternoons at Spring Valley School throughout the year were given over to art, a single session for all grades. Prior to the Christmas season, gifts were sometimes created for mothers. Some I recall were a hotpad shaped in the likeness of a hen, a sandpaper cat to be used for lighting matches, and one that particularly took my fancy—a painting of a parrot done on glass made irridescent with a backing of foil. Upon the teacher's presentation of the project I was enthralled by its beauty, but remember disappointment that my own turned out somewhat less attractive. There was the problem of applying the black enamel background and, more especially, the black outline evenly and neatly. Also, the colors had a way of bunching together on the glass, the brilliant red turning out a rosy pink, etc. The foil had to be saved up from candy bar wrappings—aluminum foil by the roll was not yet available. Difficulties notwithstanding, our home for years was graced with a handpainted parrot hanging on its walls. One year a teacher felt it necessary for older girls to learn to embroider, which pleased our mothers greatly. My particular piece was a basket of daisies stamped on white huck toweling. I shall never forget the difficulty with French knots. Invariably, I pulled them all the way through the loose weave of the huck, or else they would hang loosely by the two threads, in no way enhancing the design. Repeatedly I was instructed to rip them out and re-do. The material at the point of stamping soon became almost a big hole, the white having rapidly changed to a dirty gray. Bound by the philosophy of the maxims, "A thing worth doing at all is worth doing well", and "Always finish that which you have started", the embroidery finally was completed. After Mother's careful

laundering it was a passable "guest towel" but, more important, it was a memento from my schooldays cherished by Mother and handed on to me at a time when I was more appreciative of my disconcerted efforts. I have since learned to embroider very neatly.

The Friday afternoon art project which I enjoyed most of all was one of painting imaginary landscapes in water color on white construction paper. Lacking true watercolor paper, nor indeed having any knowledge of it or of the practice of soaking and stretching the paper before painting, and having had no training in perspective, the results were somewhat less than masterpieces, but I did them with rapt enjoyment, even as now I can enjoy a session at the easel with a brush to the extent that I lose all sense of the passing of the hours.

The tedium of long winter schooldays was relieved in mid-February with that romantic holiday dear to the hearts of little children, older schoolgirls, and a dreadful bore to boys approaching early adolescence—Valentine's Day. My earliest memory of Spring Valley is that of disappointment at missing my first Valentine's Day at school. My own mother was the school teacher at Spring Valley that year. A school teacher in the past and with her then youngest child about to join the ranks of school children, she chose to draw upon past experience, and an unexpired teaching certificate to prove it, to spend a year teaching at Spring Valley. It must have been a terrible disappointment to her when I fell gravely ill with pneumonia, requiring her to enlist the services of a substitute teacher for several weeks while nursing me back to health. Convalescing, I remember spending hours cutting, pasting, and coloring a variety of hearts for school friends, and the joy of going through the box sent home from school with my brother on Valentine's Day. One other memory of that first year of school with my mother as the teacher is still with me. It is a memory upon which I can look back with amusement over the span of years, but at the time I felt it a bitter injustice. I was severely punished by the teacher (my own mother) for having bitten the arm of one of the older boys. Somewhat jealous of the pupil who was fortunate to have her own mother teaching, the entire populace of the school seized upon this misdemeanor as a means of getting even and lost no time reporting it. Untold was the fact that I had been forcibly held by another lad while the subject of my attack had deliberately squeezed the sharp juice of an orange peel into my eye! With all the evidence against me, the "teacher" could do ought but turn a deaf ear to my protests, for to favor her own child would surely have been a black mark upon her teaching record. The boy was not necessarily given to abnormal violence. His actions were a classic example of children's inherent cruelty to other children, the pecking order, or what have you, existing in schoolyards and on homeward bound school routes the country over down through the ages.

February sometimes brought early hints of spring. The lengthening days made after school chores more attractive, the more powerful rays of the sun melted much of the snow leaving the road a quagmire of mud and water with almost a stream of current pouring across it at one very low point, a first robin may have been sighted, and morning temperatures sometimes were in the forties! In a rare season early spring became an actuality, but more often than not it was a false spring with perhaps a blizzard or two in the offing.

Because the population at Spring Valley was quite stable, March 1, known as moving day for all farmers made little impact upon our school. Once or twice, however, a pupil was gained or lost on moving day. There being one or two rented farms in the community, the occupants were apt to change from time to time. Either the renter had "gotten ahead" sufficiently to make a down payment on a farm of his own, he had reached an age when a steady 7:00 to 6:00 job in town with no after hour responsibilities looked more appealing, or, due to slothful farming practices, he had lost the privilege of renting that particular farm. When such a change was made, March 1 was looked forward to with anticipation at gaining a new pupil for Spring Valley, or with regret at losing a pal recently grown dear by the fact of imminent departure. The local newspaper carried a whole column concerning the various moves throughout the surrounding farm land on March 1. All leases were drawn up effective March 1, a good time to move as winter often moderated slightly by this time. The date was early enough to allow the family to become settled in their new home and surroundings before field work began.

One such tenant farm was often occupied by newlyweds, since it was only eighty acres in size. In that era a favorite congratulatory expression directed to the newly married was, "I wish you much happiness and joy, and at this time next year a baby boy!" No one had contemplated "exponential growth" or the threat of the population explosion. Often, then, a blessed event did occur on the tenant farm across the pasture. Home deliveries were the rule rather than the exception. The party line afforded instant news of a new arrival since the stork is notable for night time visits. The shrill ring of a telephone summons for a physician was apt to waken all, and neighborliness demanded concern for any emergency.

A treasured privilege of childhood was that of accompanying my mother on a visit to the new mother and her infant. The purpose of the visit was an offering of food fresh from our oven and a gift for the baby, but I awaited anxiously the moment when the new mother would inquire if I would like to hold the newborn. The soft, warm bundle of fleecy blue or pink was placed in my arms. Tenderly cradling the baby, I marvelled at the soft, plump face in miniature, the down like fuzz of hair, and the clasp of the tiny hand round my extended forefinger. I can still smell the clean fragrance of castile soap emanating from the bundle. I remember the air of happiness and contentment that pervaded the sparsely furnished home, stemming from the relief that all had gone well.

Eventually spring did arrive, and once more the tempo on the farms of Spring Valley stepped up. There were long days in the field readying the ground for the planting of crops, almost always corn and oats, and usually in rotation from one year to the next. This was before the days of hybridization. Fertilizing was achieved upon cleaning out the barn and the ensuing pileup in the barnlot. It was organic. Oats were seeded quite early in the season. This was accomplished with an endgate seeder mounted at the back of a farm wagon. The big planting season was that of planting corn. Corn planting took precedence over all other activities, and nothing could lure the farmer from the field on a good day at this time of year. Reminiscent is the rhythmic click, click of the planter in the fields we passed on the homeward walk from school. Balmy breezes touched our faces and ruffled the hair. If the road had dried up we were free of cumbersome boots and the inner layer of wraps, the sweater having been discarded.

It had to be quite warm, though, before we could gain permission to remove the hated long winter underwear. As we grew older, we girls solved the dilemma by rolling up the underwear in the privacy of the outhouse after getting to school, giving a sense of reckless freedom. Of course, it had to be rolled down before returning home! In spite of every precaution not to remove the underwear too early, the spring cold usually did accompany the annual shedding, due to the adjustment necessary for the body's built-in heating mechanism.

The walk home from school in the gentle spring air gave rise to dawdling, often leading to an exploration of nature. On a certain such walk, Merlin and I reached an agreement to climb the fence, traverse a field, scale another fence barrier, and follow the meandering creek through the pasture, never considering the consequences. How we did enjoy that walk! Nothing could be as fascinating to a school child as a stream winding lazily through a pasture just greening from melting snows and early spring rains. Crossing the end of the field along the overgrown fencerow we came upon last year's habitat of ground nesting birds about to return. Interwoven grasses of the nest were intact after a winter's protection of snow cover. We speculated as to just what bird had raised her brood there. Goldenrod "marbles" offered a challenge as we often plucked these and took them home for use in play. Beyond the field, the beckoning silver stream wound through the emerald green of new pasture growth. We coursed its length traversing every bend, enthralled by its ever onward flow, eddying in ripples over stones unlodged by recent flooding, swishing against outer banks only to be sent gently inward to deltas in miniature, and then onward—forever onward. We knew that the very flow of water which held our gaze would continue on its route, mile after mile, to eventually empty into the Gulf of Mexico. Long Dick creek flows into Skunk River, a tributary of the Mississippi River.

Undoubtedly it was the long way around, both in distance and in time, but, worst of all, the creek bank placed us in line of vision from Mother's kitchen window. That it was out of bounds had been understood ever since embarking upon school days, and neither of the two of us can understand our complete disregard for rules that particular night. An especially obedient and responsible eldest child, having taken the pasture walk was definitely out of character for Merlin. It must have had something to do with the lure of spring. The walk itself, as well as the memories of our adventuresome spirit, and the chagrin at our parents' dire "lack of enthusiasm" in sharing our enjoyment of the experience (consternation would more aptly describe their reaction), remain a shared treasure to this day.

Spring for the homemaker of Spring Valley meant several things, chief among them poultry raising, gardening, and, lastly, spring house cleaning. Returning home from school on a day late in spring, it was exciting to find curtains down, furniture moved away from the walls, and carpets flung over the clothesline to be "beaten". A carpet beater was considered a necessity, but, in its absence, a stout stick was a good substitute. I was often assigned the task of beating the carpet before it was brought back into the house. Spring housecleaning usually marked the change in family living from a couple of heated rooms to the whole house. What a joy to have the freedom of moving about through the whole house, and, most of all, the additional room gained by the removal of the heater from the dining room. As evenings grew warmer we were permitted to play out after supper. Indeed, chores such as milking were often after supper chores when field work started, so there were long evenings of batting up flies under the yard light while our parents worked at the chores.

A bit of refurbishing that happened at no particular time of year and not necessarily during spring house cleaning was the annual refilling of the straw tick. Not all beds in the house were equipped with bona fide, store bought mattresses, and the innerspring mattress along with the box spring was an item of luxury unheard of in the simple farm home. The straw tick consisted of a yardage of blue and white striped mattress ticking sewn into an envelope shape of a size to fit the particular bed. Sometimes the tick was filled with clean, golden straw from a new straw pile after threshing. Ends of straw had a way of pricking one right through the ticking the first few nights in use, so straw as a filler was not wholly desirable. Also it contained a certain amount of oat chaff which had a way of sifting out to the floor beneath however carefully the closing was secured. More often, then, the filler in the straw tick was renewed on corn shelling day. Clean white corn husks had a special springiness when stuffed into the straw tick. Great care was taken to sift through the material used, whether straw or husk, avoiding the importation of rodents or other forms of wildlife into the home. Stuffed to capacity, the overlapping slit was drawn to a close and secured with large strong "army blanket pins". These were oversize safety pins about four or five inches in length, and constructed of very strong steel, so as to never pull apart under extreme strain. Until the filler became packed by use, it resembled a giant rounded pillow. The occupant of the bed was admonished not to roll off during the night. At its best it was always a humpy, lumpy bed, usually bearing the imprint of the person sleeping in it, unless the housewife fastidiously turned and "fluffed" it with each change of bedding.

The last evening chore for my mother at this time of year was to check her "setting hens", to be sure they returned to their nest of eggs to "set" after feeding. Easily excitable, we were not often permitted to accompany her, lest we frighten the hens with idle chatter. It was a rare privilege, then, to experience the warm coziness of the "setting" room, hear the motherly "cluck, cluck" of the brood hens, and, if the three weeks of incubation were near the end, to be allowed to hold a warm egg up to our ear and listen for the barely audible "cheep, cheep" of the ready-to-be-hatched chick! The spring hatching became a problem when heavy rains persisted, and a fond memory is that of waking to the intensified sound of a washtub full of fluffy yellow down, from which eminated a chorus of loud cheeping. They had been taken to the house to be kept warm by an open oven door until weather was more favorable and a few days of life added to their hardiness. No spring arrives but what I at one time or another experience a wistful nostalgia for the little fluff of yellow down nestled between childhood hands, and the chorus eminating from the washtub.

Easter brought vacation from school on Good Friday, and another opportunity to decorate school windows. This holiday was simply observed with the strong emphasis on the Resurrection. We did have Easter egg candy, but at Spring Valley the coming of the Easter Bunny was totally unheard of. We read in the newspapers of the annual Easter egg roll on the White House lawn, but Easter egg hunts had not yet become common practice. Easter lillies were out of the reach of the pocketbook and were generally something we saw only in pictures, but we knew well the cross and it was made dear to us.

Lacking a holiday, there was one other opportunity to use creative talent in decorating the schoolroom—covering the dictionary stand with new crepe paper. This was thumb tacked onto the shelf, allowed to extend down to conceal the brackets, then crimped between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand with a pull from the forefinger of the right hand, producing a kind of scalloped effect possible only with crepe paper because of its ability to stretch. I well remember my elation at having become old enough to do the honors. The dictionary shelf was mounted at the back of the room, directly above the pencil sharpener. The large volume of Webster's dictionary always lay

69

open on the shelf. One teacher in particular made the effort to teach us how to use the dictionary, but never was it so constant a companion to me in school as in adult years. Perhaps I was more sure of unerring spelling in schooldays, but then it may have been felt that it was not worth the bother to look up a word when writing. What looms ahead as "too much work" in childhood, becomes routine in adult life. At any rate, I credit Florence Henderson Vespestad, my eighth grade teacher at Spring Valley, with having made the difference by stressing the importance of dictionary usage. She was an especially fine teacher, and most nearly approximated that first pre-requisite of a teacher drummed into prospective teachers in the years when the University of Northern Iowa at Cedar Falls, Iowa was Iowa State Teachers College: "A teacher must have a sympathetic understanding of each and every child, not only the one or two which are especially appealing, but also, and more especially, the one whom he simply cannot abide!" She impressed upon us the freedom of democracy. I particularly remember her informing the boys of the school (equality of sexes not then dreamed of) that in the United States it was possible for anyone to attain the highest office in the land, that of the President of the United States, and that even a boy from a remote rural area could rise to such honors should he aspire to do so. She gave a part of herself to each of us, as did all the other fine teachers of Spring Valley, but more than that, she gave us visions into the future—wings to soar!

Suddenly at Spring Valley it was Maytime, but in the early years of Spring Valley there were only eight months of school, so school was out in April. Later this was revised and nine months became the rule. Maybaskets at Spring Valley were not given much attention. When they were, however, the time for hanging these was not limited to the first day of May. I have never since encountered a community where this custom prevailed, but it makes much more sense than the single day observance, when, like as not, in attempting to deliver the basket, the recipient himself is likely to be out delivering a similar offering.

I well remember my first experience with Maybaskets. I was playing in the yard while other family members were busy at work in the barn. Suddenly, to my wondering eyes, I caught a quick glimpse of figures stealthily rising from the roadside ditch to dash quickly behind the house. Childlike, I wondered if it had been only fantasy, when, ringing out through the soft evening air of a night in May, there were shouts of "Maybasket!" I looked to my mother with alarm, but it was apparent that she knew the connotation, for she directed, "Run and catch them!" There were other Maybasket experiences, always a surprise in that they did not happen on a given day, but at any time in the "merry month of May". The first basket was brought to me by older neighbor girls living across the pasture. I'm sure they never realized that they provided my childhood with a most fairy tale-like experience. The Sevareid girls, Judith and Eva, moved from our community long before my days at Spring Valley were ended, but while still our neighbors, I remember a warm summer evening with them, along with the Severson girls from across the road. They had come by to pick me up to accompany them to an adjacent cemetery to pick wild violets. Of all places to pick flowers! At that time the cemetery was never mowed and the violets of a large, showy variety carpeted the whole plot. They must have been wild prairie flowers. We had been cautioned not to pick anything growing on a grave, but it was not considered a violation to pick the general yard. We ended the evening by sitting in a semi-circle telling ghost stories until we scared ourselves into returning home by the light of a brilliant moon.

As the school year drew to a close two important events were uppermost in the minds of all at Spring Valley. The first was the spring cleanup day. Each pupil brought a rake to school, and the afternoon was spent raking the entire schoolyard. The raking was in earnest, and I remember blistered hands—nor were there lawn brooms. Rakes were of the heavy garden variety, the grass long and tough. We did have a responsible part in keeping our schoolyard clean. The bonus so anticipated was the huge bonfire of raked up grass over which we were allowed to roast wieners and marshmallows, brought, as I remember it, from home for the occasion. Some years our enthusiasm waned as each succeeding day proved to be too windy for such an undertaking. Windy or not, I cannot imagine the appalling responsibility thrust upon the teacher at such a venture, but I suppose self-reliance in the matter of fire safety was acquired by every pupil at an early age.

Oil lamps were the rule rather than the exception in home lighting. On one occasion, while visiting a neighboring family, the Burt Mortvedts, we children were left to play in the kitchen while our elders visited in the "other room". As was usual when families of children got together, play became a bit boistrous. One of us, perhaps none other than I, bounced against the kitchen table, upending the table leaf on which was sitting the lighted lamp. Acting quickly, Rosella, the eldest, dashed to extinguish the flame before disaster set in. Commended for her quick thinking and responsible action by the adults, she bore an enviable position, while we were reprimanded for playing so roughly in the house.

Mrs. Mortvedt (Agnes) was notable at Spring Valley for her flavorful nut cake. A feather light, nut studded, white layer cake topped with shining peaks of white boiled icing, it may have been the traditional birthday cake in their family. I remember its being served at a special birthday party honoring both Rosella and Amil. The nuts were black walnut, gleaned from a local grove. They had been painstakingly picked out of the hard, cracked shells. I wonder if her family still has and uses the recipe. The taste of black walnuts always brings to mind that luscious product of culinary effort.

Perhaps the most jubilant day of the school year was the annual school picnic. Looking forward to it for weeks ahead, it seemed almost within reach when the teacher took up the project of planning it with the help of the entire enrollment. The menu was planned by all—usually the routine potato salad, sandwiches, beans, cake, pickles—with each child volunteering an item from his home. Yes, there was always ice cream, too . . . a contribution from the teacher, no matter how large the crowd, whether only mothers and pupils or whole families were in attendance. Always ordered delivered by a local restaurant, a five gallon container well insulated against the warm spring day, would arrive just after the meal, along with cones, and at day's end the container would be empty.

Often the picnic was held at the schoolhouse itself, yet the holiday spirit prevailed throughout the day. A favorite site for the picnic was "Henderson Grove", which meant that families would arrive individually in the family car. Henderson Grove was a wooded bit of pasture land where someone had generously provided picnic tables, and many a school picnic and Sunday School picnic was held there, as well as family reunions. Its chief feature was a large rope swing, accommodating five or six at a time, which carried one out over the river! This was the Skunk River. The town park at Jewell, Iowa, also became a favorite spot for Spring Valley picnics. The park was equipped with playground equipment and a ball diamond with a grandstand of sorts.

Much as we looked forward to the starting of a new year of school in the fall, we once more felt the same excitement at leaving books and studies behind us for the summer. Summer was a succession of carefree days at Spring Valley. There was no organized play nor organized children's groups of any kind, but we didn't miss them. We did have time for vacation Bible school—long sessions of it, but it was a time to enjoy as pressure of learning was at a minimum, and it was a time to become acquainted with newfound friends. In that era Scott Township and part of Lincoln Township were predominantly Lutheran, the prayer ban in public schoolrooms was far in the distant future, and it was a natural to open alternate country schoolhouses for these sessions. Directing our studies was either a seminary student or a dedicated local farm woman, Mrs. Elmer Narland. Considering that she had no children, her interest in the youth of the community was unique. Her husband shared her interest, and their home was often opened to relatives or relative's children in times of stress or need. The Narland's will long be remembered for their many kindnesses and for their ever-present generosity, as well as their service to the community in a variety of ways. My first memories of vacation Bible school are of a month of all day sessions, and later there were six weeks of half days, beginning at 8:00 a.m., to avoid the heat of the afternoon. Some of the older boys escaped what to them was tedium of more school, because they were invaluable to the farm operation in the matter of urgent corn plowing at that season of the year.

Vacation Bible school or corn plowing notwithstanding, in our younger years there were idyllic summer days—riding aimlessly in the pony cart behind the faithful Velox, our Shetland pony, sometimes stopping to pick our straw hats full of the sweetest of wild strawberries, our hats forever stained with the red juice; days of wading in the creek when it was low enough to be deemed safe, and of digging the blue clay from its banks to bring home, where I fashioned miniature tea sets which my mother obligingly baked in the oven. Unaware of the intricate processing necessary to render native clay usable for pottery making, mine were very brittle and soon broke to pieces. There were days of finding nests of baby rabbits in the strawberry patch while our parents, aunts, and uncles picked strawberries until their backs ached, their shirts and dresses bleached white by the powerful June sunshine.

Our summer play was not uninterrupted. There were the various children's chores such as picking bugs off the potato plants, hulling peas for the family meal or for canning—to pick and to hull a five gallon pail of peas is a long process—, picking roasting ears from the field, then shucking them for the table, or perhaps also for canning and preserving, and for years our orchard boasted four productive cherry trees. A lumber wagon was placed underneath a tree to give greater height for picking and whole days were spent picking cherries, then helping pit

73

them, first by hand, and later with a borrowed cherry pitter. Either way at day's end much of the surface of the kitchen work area and the worker herself were covered with sticky cherry juice, for squirting could not be avoided.

The biggest midsummer treat was the making of homemade ice cream, accomplished by bringing home a block of ice secured to a car bumper, dripping all the way. Almost as good as the ice cream itself were the shards of ice that were a delight to hold in the hand in the heat of midsummer—ice in the summertime! We were forbidden to suck it as it was not clean ice.

Treasured in the summer heat was the chance trip to town with Dad which usually meant an ice cream cone. Then there were Saturday nights—everyone went to town on Saturday night, my mother armed with her case or two of eggs which she would trade for groceries and perhaps come out with a little cash "egg money", Dad to visit with various acquaintances and perhaps get a haircut, and we children to look for a chance encounter with a friend. Cars of drivers fortunate enough to find a parking space on main street were filled with women visiting and watching passersby. We never stayed late as there was always Sunday School the next morning, but just before returning home there was always the treat of an ice cream cone. Remembered from the Verd Miller restaurant in the town of Ellsworth is the ice cream cone with the candied cherry atop. This is a treasured memory of several generations of children growing up in the Ellsworth community. The candy cherry made those ice cream cones most special.

Punctuating the months of summer vacation were two national holidays, Memorial Day and the "Fourth", the Fourth of July, with a capital F! Because rural school sessions were traditionally of only eight months in the early twenties, Memorial Day, or Decoration Day, seemed to come in the heart of the summer. In our community it was a day of great importance, a day of special remembering of the dead, and especially the war dead, as well as a day to honor veterans from all wars in which our country had been engaged.

At our home the national flag was taken from storage immediately upon arising and hung from its two rings flat against the porch wall, proclaiming for all passersby, though they might be few and far between, that on this day we would pause to give honor to those who had proudly served their country. As a family we took special pride in the flag hung so colorfully in the brightness of the new day, the sun just peering over the horizon, and with not the slightest breeze to ruffle the early morning air. On the evening of the preceding day we had joined the numerous visitors to the nearby cemetery to decorate ancestral graves, and so on this beautiful morning the cemetery was a sight to behold. Walking among the graves, my parents remembered this one and that one who had passed on. At mid-morning we joined others of the locality for the Memorial Day service at the cemetery, at which a color guard was scheduled to shoot a volley of blank shots over the grave of each departed soldier. A pastor gave a brief address, there was a vocal rendition, a capella, and then the shots rang out. Startled youngsters whimpered and clung to the security of a mother's skirts. After the crowd had dispersed, boys had a heyday collecting the empty shell casings, and adults renewed old acquaintances returning for the day to decorate graves of departed parents and to pause briefly in memoriam.

A much more impressive service brought us all into town for the afternoon. After a band concert of national tunes on main street there was a march to the schoolhouse gymnasium by the band, the color guard, and a band of preschool youngsters serving as flower bearers. At the schoolhouse they formed a procession, their entrance creating a solemn moment of remembrance. Marching in the color guard were veterans of World War I and of the Spanish American War. Veterans from the Civil War were of a great age and few in number. They were privileged to be seated on the stage along with local pastors and the speaker of the day, usually a figure in government, some of whom were bound to be politicians, others real statesmen. Some fine oratory was delivered from that stage, and always an older child delivered the famed Lincoln's Gettysburg Address with great expression, having committed the whole to memory. Palma Lande, whose friendship I later enjoyed, gave the rendition annually for a period of time, and very capably. In later life her original poetry contributed to many an event in the community.

In my memory there were only two Civil War veterans in our community, and one was my grandfather, John M. Johnson. At the end of the ceremony, a flower girl came up onto the stage to pin a flower on the lapel of these especially honored veterans. Memories of my grandfather include visits to our home on threshing days to observe the interesting activities, but he spent much time in a rocker in the shade of the porch, since at his age there was a limit to the amount of heat he could stand. He entertained us as children with tales of his service in the war. I was impressed at his statement that he had walked across the entire United States. As a young child, he had come to America with his parents, while my maternal grandfather, John O. Ringstad, had emigrated as a young man at about the close of the Civil War. Grandpa Ringstad shared our family home intermittently in his late years. He was a born storyteller, and his tales of pioneering enriched our lives, giving us an interest in local history and an appreciation of twentieth century progress. He witnessed the founding of the town of Ellsworth and was the first postmaster there.

Memorial Day festivities did not end with the program at the gymnasium, but progressed to a cemetery just beyond the town. Here the performance of the morning at country cemeteries was repeated on a much larger scale. The band of flower girls and boys was led to each flag decked soldier's grave and, two by two, proceded to lay a spray of flowers on each honored grave. Family members traditionally gathered about the graves of their departed family members. Later we always stopped at the home of my grandfather for a bit of lunch, extending the visiting, and, reluctantly, ending the lovely day of remembrance.

The "Fourth" was observed with celebrations in the various towns throughout the countryside, and it was a matter of mild family controversy as to which one the family would attend. Paramount to the children was the attraction of amusement concessions and rides, while parents tended to be attracted by the speaker for the occasion, and family picnics planned well in advance. At any rate the celebration of the Fourth afforded a midsummer visit with a favorite school chum, a delicious picnic dinner of cold fried chicken and apple pie, a merry-go-round ride or two, ice cream and soda pop, a helium filled baloon, the delight of my early childhood but on which my parents were reluctant to spend money (balloons break and their pleasure is so temporary), and at the end of the day, fireworks! Happy, indeed, was the Fourth when the men returned home to do the chores while other family members remained at the park awaiting their return for the evening display of fireworks. More often my weary parents were eager to call it a day in late afternoon, and we had to content ourselves with watching the fireworks from a distance, seated on the back door step. I well remember the retained warmth of the concrete from the day's heat in the cool of the evening. Of course there were firecrackers, devils on the walk, sparklers, cherry bombs, and, with supervision from Dad out away from the buildings, even Roman Candles to add to our own enjoyment of the memorable day. On this day, too, the flag was displayed on the front porch wall, and later there were available for purchase an array of flags to be mounted on the radiator cap as a Fourth of July decoration, but the Fourth never brought the lump into the throat that did the solemn observance of Memorial Day.

Walking the quarter mile to the mailbox where we received and dispatched mail was a real joy in the summer time. Through it we came to know the variety of roadside wild flowers. This was before the days of much road grading, and long before roadside spraying, so the fencerows were grown over with virgin prairie grasses and flowers. They abounded with sweet william, a wild lavender phlox, and what we called orange sweet william, more likely to have been a hoary puccoon, wild iris blooming in a bed where the ditch held water much of the spring time, the lacquered petals of the gold buttercup, the heavy scented wild rose which was later to be named the state flower of Iowa, bouncing bets, daisies and clover, and the pink cone flower which, along with what we called "snake grass", (really a joint grass of a tubular nature), provided us with hours of fascinating play. We called the pink cone flowers Indian combs, imagining that they had been used by Indians as hair combs in lieu of the store bought kind. We removed the long pink petals and tried combing one another's hair with the stiff cones. The "snake grass" we pulled apart and put back together again to form long strands or "snakes". Separating the joints, small amounts of slightly sticky, colorless fluid oozed out from them. Velox, a little gray Shetland pony had come to us as a sort of hand-me-down from cousins who had outgrown him. Merlin was allowed to hitch the pony to a spring seat pony wagon, and together we would ride the countryside, searching for patches of strawberries. When Velox was in the possession of the cousins he became a pet of the town of Ellsworth. Being very small in stature, he was permitted to enter the local drug store with his master, where he was favored with some sweet from the proprietor, carefully munched from the palm of the hand. He was growing old when he came to us. For a time he was a great joy and at times a convenience. I can remember my mother's driving him to a Farm Bureau women's meeting at Spring Valley in the summer a time or two. She was not a horse woman, and left the handling of horses to the menfolk, but this small pony was manageable for her. Later he developed a mean streak, as Shetland ponies have a way of doing. He became stubborn, took to biting with his strong teeth, and at times even reared up on his hind legs to chase us in this upright manner across the yard to the safety of the houseyard gate. He bore, too, the affliction of a malady—his hooves grew more rapidly than they could be kept trimmed, curling up to resemble sled runners. This affliction of his old age must have been a great aggravation to him, rendering him somewhat less mobile than in youth.

Trudging along the dirt road on a lazy summer's day offered to a child the rare pleasure of pushing bare toes through piles of the softest of dust, the product of a pelting summer rain. Torrents of rain spilling down a hill deposited these pockets of fine washed granules of earth with nary a harsh pebble to bruise the soles of young feet. Going barefoot was frowned upon by our parents, but occasionally we were permitted to do so provided we stayed away from portions of the farm yard where there might be rusty bits of metal, rusty nails, or broken glass. "Blood poison" was greatly to be feared. A siege of such an infection involved numerous trips to the doctor and much home treatment, both a nuisance and a hindrance to work done in the busy season of productivity. Stepping on a rusty nail was considered a prime opportunity to acquire such an infection. Prior to discovery of antibiotics, the treatment of "blood poisoning" was a slow process even with skilled medical attention. Often times the wound was treated for a while at home to avoid both the waste of time and the expense of a visit to the doctor. Two lines of door to door salesmen traversed the countryside, selling their special salve purported to cure such infection. Remembering the odor of the ointment, it had to have contained carbolic acid, so no doubt had some curative properties. Poultices were often applied to "draw out the infection" and sometimes to draw out an imbedded sliver. Favorites were poultices of yeast bread in milk, the fresh peeled skin of an egg shell, and hot wet packs, all of which were applied directly to the wound. Notwithstanding treatment, at times a red stripe would appear, progressing angrily from the wound toward the general direction of the heart. Whether day or night, the presence of such a stripe triggered a hurried trip to town to a doctor's office. Impending death was felt to be a real danger, should the stripe reach the heart.

One hot summer season I woke in the middle of the night to hear the farmyard gate creak open, and sprang to the window in time to see our Model T disappear down the road. Investigation proved the house deserted except for a sleeping younger brother, Curtis. It was morning before I learned the reason for the hasty departure—a red stripe creeping up Dad's arm from a hand injury! Their destination was the nearest doctor's office.

The traveling salesman peddling his curative salves also carried a line of flavorings and household items. Visitors to our far out farm were few. We youngsters regarded these door-to-door salesmen with avid interest. This was especially true of the one or two whose neatly compartmented black bags were apt to produce a package of gum as a treat for the children. Depending upon his visits for certain supplies, Mother, too, enjoyed the interlude from the day's routine except on those days when she chanced to be in an especial hurry. Then she was heard to say at the supper table, "And you might know, the Raleigh man had to call today!" She could not refuse our eager pleas, however, to allow him to come in to show his wares, whether or not she needed anything. She knew we were counting on the package of gum.

Late in summer the threshing season provided excitement for the entire neighborhood, but it was excitement coupled with exceedingly strenuous work for both the men and women. For the farmer it meant rising with the sun, or before, to do up the morning chores before breakfast, hitch up a team of horses to a hayrack, and then to be on duty at an early hour to haul bundles of oats shocks from the field of a neighbor into the yard, there pitching them off into the separator. Keeping his turn in line, the day consisted of trip after trip to the field and back again, interrupted only by the noon hour, given over to the devouring of a most sumptuous meal by relays, and ending late in the afternoon with another such meal, dubbed supper.

Extra responsibility fell upon the farm wife left at home, since there was always livestock to be looked after. It was necessary that all animals had adequate supplies of water in the hot summer months, and especially so for hogs inclined to obesity. It was considered prudent even to slosh water on them to cool them on hottest days. To lose an animal from heat or any other cause meant a serious dent in farm income. The threshing season did provide some surcease from heavy meal preparation in that the men of the household necessarily ate the two main meals a day away from home. For this vacation she paid dearly when it was her turn to feed the threshers, and at times her services were needed to help out at a neighbor's home in cooking the meals.

To us children it was a time of joyous excitement when the big steam engine could be sighted rolling down the road toward our place. Mother assured us that she did not share our joy, but she necessarily rose to the occasion. A big dilemma was not knowing whether or not she would be having to feed them the first meal. Sometimes the big engine pulled into the yard about eleven a.m. Through telephone conversation with the farm wife at the preceding "job", it was ascertained whose responsibility would be the noon meal. This generally fell to the home from which the crew had just departed, much to the relief of the homemaker at the new job. Much more to be desired was the job that was finished in the evening with the machine moved following the evening meal. Then it was a sure thing that we would be having "threshers" the following day. It goes without saying the feeding of the threshers took precedence over any and all other activities. No homemaker was expected to contribute to church or community activities when she had threshers to feed. Sisters or sisters-in-law were often pressed into duty to help with the cooking and serving, and young girls often were available to wait tables. The ample fare of the threshing table was another reason for our enjoyment of the season.

The day began for everyone at four a.m., as the man who ran the steam engine appeared well before daybreak, sometimes by the light of the moon at about three a.m., to fire up the boiler in order to have achieved the necessary steam pressure to begin the day's work. This job accomplished, he would slip out of his extra coveralls, covered with coal dust, wash off excess grime with soap and warm water set out on a wash bench for the purpose, comb his hair before the mirror suspended from a nail driven into a tree, and appear for a hearty breakfast with the family. Much consideration was given to the housewife in the way of striving not to dirty the table cloth which he knew would quite possibly have to serve the entire day. Often he asked that newspapers be put down to save the chair seat, and that a tea towel be laid over the white tablecloth where his arms rested.

Elmer Narland operated the steam engine for many years. My own father was also skilled in the operation and one year he was the "engineer". At other times he operated an engine for some other threshing ring. He received his training in "stationary engines" at the former Highland Park College located in Des Moines, Iowa. My mother also took some teacher training there as well as at St. Olaf, Northfield, Minnesota.

Besides providing the ample breakfast of fried potatoes, eggs and bacon or sausage, cooked cereal and fruit of some kind, the housewife had to lend a hand with that inevitable chore, milking cows, since the farmer himself had much extra work when the threshers were on his place. The stock tank had to be constantly filled with a supply of fresh water for watering the numerous teams of horses. Stacking the straw whether in the barn or outside usually was his lot with perhaps the help of a young lad in the neighborhood expert at the job. A work force of fourteen or sixteen men was a real challenge when accustomed to perhaps only one hired man or often none at all.

The day presented a challenge to the homemaker and her helpers, too. All cooking was done on a coal and wood burning kitchen range, so adequate fuel supply had to be maintained, as well as an even heat kept up in the stove, regardless of soaring outdoor temperatures. Refrigeration was achieved by means of a cooling tank in line with the stock tank. Before and after each meal milk, butter, and cream, sealed into waterproof containers, had to be carried the length of the barnyard and submerged in the cooler or removed from it. Understandably this task was often assigned to the nimble feet of a child. Supplying fresh meat for the threshing table was a great problem. Obviously it could not be either purchased or provided ahead of time, what with no refrigeration in the home. Early in the day, then, the homemaker placed her threshing order with the local "butcher", or meat market operator, for the day's meat supply, and anything else needed. Operators of such stores complied with the need for delivery service in such emergencies as a matter of routine. Rare was the housewife who was able to operate an automobile in those days. Those who did had no time for errands into town on threshing day. I have memories of my mother at the phone pricing ground beef, roast beef, and roast pork, as well as its availability, giving an order for anywhere from fourteen to twenty pounds. Amounts had to be gauged quite accurately as there was no holding over of extras in the heat of the summer. Here the storekeeper was helpful. He inquired how many she planned to feed and brought out a proper amount.

Curt, my younger brother remembers the luxury of "baker's bread" on these occasions, and how he feasted on the soft, tender, snowy white morsels. At all other times every slice of bread that appeared on the table was mixed, kneaded, and shaped by my mother's hands. If the supply ran out, baking powder biscuits were resorted to, as they could be quickly mixed and baked in a very hot oven. Because of this my mother became an expert baker of fluffy white baking powder biscuits. Considered a poor substitute for real bread by the men, I relished the delicate tidbits spread with real butter and strawberry jam. The butter, too, was home churned, and the jam homemade.

Turning the churn until butter formed was another child's task. Ours was a barrel type churn, set on a frame allowing the barrel to be turned over and over with the revolving of a handle. I can still hear the splash, splash, seemingly endless, until finally the sound changed to a definite thump, thump, signifying the formation of butter. Occasionally the cork was removed from the

81

barrel during the churning process to allow air to escape. It was a breathless moment when the churn was opened from the top. The masses of fatty white globs didn't in the least resemble butter as it came to the table, for the process was not yet finished. Mother removed the white clumps with a wooden butter ladle, placing them in a wooden bowl. The liquid, buttermilk, was drained from the churn, reserved for baking or consumed as a beverage. I never learned to like the taste of buttermilk, but for those who found it palatable, fresh buttermilk was a real treat. Remaining was the task of "working" the butter, and of working into it just the right amount of salt and yellow food coloring, the former to bring out the flavor and the latter to add eye appeal. Repulsive was white butter on the table, but equally repulsive was butter tinged a deep orange, so one had to be judicious. Then followed the process of picking up the mass from the bowl, pressing it against the sides of the bowl and alternately draining off buttermilk still oozing from the shapeless form. Finally the butter took form, droplets of fluid ceased to appear, and the butter was transferred to a stone jar.

When company was expected, some of the butter was placed in a wooden imprinted butter mold, to be unmolded in a picture pretty form onto a special butter dish for the bountiful table. For threshers this last was seldom deemed necessary, as eye appeal was hardly necessary to tempt appetites in threshing time.

Also on the morning of threshers there was the task of baking a number of pies, as pies of a variety were usually the dessert of the noon time meal. Unheard of was lunch at noon and dinner at night, either at the threshing season or at any other time. It was always breakfast, dinner, and supper, with the concession of midafternoon lunch carried to the field during the oat harvest season. This, too, was often a child's task. Sometimes, when time allowed, Mother walked with us to the field with the lunch, and we had a nice family time. After the long, hot walk all were hungry. With forethought, enough had been packed to go around.

At these times the rule was to bake a cake a day. Calories were unheard of, and if they had been, no one would have thought to have shunned them, nor would they have had any need for concern. Walking across oat stubble was torture for small legs without the protection of pant legs, and it was not yet customary to put girls in pants. I remember the continuous scratch, scratch of the sharp stubble, and I hunted for a wheel track laid the right way to bend the stubble away from my legs. We enjoyed these treks to the field, however, and what opportunities they must have offered for family togetherness. We all sat in the shade of a shock or two, thus shielding ourselves from the cruel rays of the afternoon sun. My father insisted on hot coffee with his lunch rather than cool lemonade, believing, and rightly so, that hot, unsweetened liquid was more cooling to the body than a cool beverage. The men's shirts were soaked with perspiration. There were mingled fragrances of cake still warm from the oven, steaming cups of coffee, oats chaf, and honest sweat! To further quench the thirst after the hearty lunch, Dad often fished under an oat bundle for the faithful stoneware jug of water, kept cool by the burlap covering which was purposely saturated with water at intervals. The jug was carried to the fields by Dad daily in the crop season, year after year.

A significant conversation at such a lunch period has remained in my mind all these years. "I hear there is a fellow over by Radcliffe who has purchased a combine," Dad announced. There was much excited speculation about the wonderful new machine, designed to eliminate the process of harvesting as well as threshing. Oats were separated from straw right in the field!

At that time the prospect of such change was incredible, both as to technical possibility and financial reality, but it was a real portent of things to come. A decade or two later, the threshing operation had become extinct on the Iowa farm. My mother often remarks that it is a season that she never misses, and understandably so, but it was a colorful one, of which we children were wont to make the most. At day's end, when the last bundle hauler had eaten his supper and trotted his team off down the road toward home, and when the dusk of the already shortening late summer days was settling in, Merlin and I, and later, Curtis, begged for the opportunity to clamber up into the steam engine to pull the whistle rope. Early in the evening steam pressure was usually adequate to blow the whistle and it could be heard to resound throughout the countryside. I can still see the smelly, oily black interior of the cab, feel the radiant heat of the steam boiler in the cool air of an August evening, and hear the whistle pierce the air. The engineer and the separator man were the elite of the threshing ring. At the other end was the "water monkey", the lad appointed to haul water to the steam engine all day long, the water needed for the generation of steam. Fun was poked at him by the bundle haulers, but he treasured his job, as it often marked his emergence into manhood.

When the "rig" was set up at a neighbor's, we would keep a listening ear for the rumble of Dad's hay rack as it came down the road. More often than not, we would run up the road for a ride back with him. An empty hay rack does not offer a smooth ride, and I can still feel the rude jouncing, which, in childhood, we minded not a whit.

At the very end of one such threshing season, tragedy befell the Spring Valley community. The last job of the season had been postponed due to repetitious rains. Finally the shocks in the field were deemed dry enough to thresh by the farmer so affected, and so the crew was called in for an afternoon's work sufficient to finish the task. It was a day of ragged, low-hanging clouds, sultry and oppressive, but also with a violent gale of wind blowing all day long. Curtis, a toddler, was ill with "summer complaint", a common ailment of the pre-refrigeration era, for it was difficult to keep foods fresh and untainted with spoilage. A baby's second summer was considered to be an especially critical one for this affliction. The reason was that he was then eating foods from the family table, following suspension of the almost universal breast feeding of earlier infancy. To me was allotted the task of keeping the ailing younger brother somewhat mollified in his state of malaise. It being unduly hot within the confines of the house, I spent the afternoon out in the yard, trying to keep him out of Mother's way. The hot winds tore at us as if they would never stop. Mother and Merlin did up the evening chores, and as the supper hour drew near, the sky became more and more ominous. Since there were to be just us children for whom to make supper Mother decided on pancakes. While mixing them, she began to worry about Dad's getting home before the storm broke. Soon we were rewarded by the welcome sound of the hayrack rumbling down the road. As the first raindrops came pelting down, Dad raced into the yard. He hurriedly put away the team of horses, glad that the day's work was at an end. He explained as he rushed into the house that he had declined to stay for supper because of the impending storm, even though he knew the lady of the house had been prepared for a crowd, a fact for which he was heartily sorry. Within minutes there were brilliant flashes of lightning and loud cracks of thunder. Our family retired to the bedroom adjoining the kitchen as it was not deemed wise to be around an iron stove when there was sharp lightning. Pulling the switch on the radio aerial was a must in the early days of the radio, as it was also considered to draw lightning. Thinking the storm would be over as fast as it came up, Mother returned to the kitchen repeatedly to turn the pancakes baking in the griddle on the stove top, and to fire in the fuel to do the baking. We children amused ourselves counting between the red-orange flashes and the first rumble of thunder following, believing that the point of striking was an equal number of miles away. Also, we counted the number of severe shocks, secure in the togetherness of our family, now that Dad had come home. At the count of seventeen loud crashes of lightning, my mother reluctantly went to the kitchen, fearing for her safety in contact with the iron stove, but not wanting to spoil the family supper. As she turned the cakes her gaze was drawn to the window opposite the room. At once she exclaimed, "Oh, Jesse, come here and see this funny looking cloud!" As one, we looked, then rapidly headed for the basement, our very hearts in our throats, for the giant gray pillow of a cloud appeared to be setting down in our own barnyard. After a moment, when nothing happened, Dad climbed up onto a table in order to see out of our high basement window. He was able to see that it was farther away than first appeared. Announcing that it was passing beyond Tjernagel's grove, he threw up the grade entrance door, and told us all to come up to watch its progress, as we would probably never again see such a sight. To my later regret, I continued to cower in the basement for a bit, so missed the closest view of the tornado cloud that was to wreck such havoc. I missed seeing it pick up and roll over onto its roof the Solomon Thompson home less than a mile away in which a mother and her newborn infant lay in bed, and the rest of the family sat at the supper table. Here bed, mother, and infant rolled right with the house, and not a single member of the family was injured. A newly immigrated hired man from Norway seated at the family table was reported to have exclaimed in acute surprise, "Who's tipping the house over?" Homeless at the end of summer, the family took up residence in a makeshift home while a new home was being constructed. Due to inadequate housing, the baby, an only son, took pneumonia and succombed to its grip. Thus he was numbered a casualty of the tornado.

Just as I emerged from the comparative security of the basement the storm hit the Nuebauer farm home, a half mile down the road. It appeared as a giant explosion. Black soil was thrown into the air and jagged, ripped open trees gleamed in the now brilliant sunlight, along with timbers thrown up from the various buildings. I can still see the new lumber look of the split siding thrown high into the air, as well as the "inside-out" tree branches, with the bright blue sky as a back drop. This was the third home struck by the storm, and by that time the air had cleared to the brilliancy following a rain storm, the setting sun shining peacefully. In the complete stillness of the air, leaves came tumbling down out of the blue as if from nowhere. This phenomena caused many a family to be caught unawares as, with the passing of the pelting rain, lightning, and thunder, they proceeded to go about normal activities, not discerning the approach of the single, powerful, funnel cloud.

At this point, all danger appeared to have passed for us. My father's first reaction was to gather his family around him as he dropped to his knees to offer up a fervent prayer of thanks to God for preserving us from destruction and an equally fervent plea for the safety of all who had been less fortunate. Then, supper forgotten, we all piled into the family auto and drove to our nearest neighbor, where it could be readily seen that the storm had originated almost a mile from our home—and it had looked so near! It had, in fact, demolished the Maynard Johnson barn across the fields from the first home taken. Mother, Curt, and I were left at the Tjernagel's, while the men joined together to travel to the various neighbors where the disaster had struck, their purpose, to give aid wherever they could. Darkness was about to settle in, but it was hours before they returned. Out in our neighbor's yard, I stood watching the monstrous funnel cloud for a full hour, silhouetted against the clear blue sky, while it traveled a distance of some forty miles. Whenever it struck a farmstead, the cloud blackened and spread out, only to resume its true funnel shape after passing the inhabited area. It wore itself out in the vicinity of Alden, Iowa, wrecking havoc wherever it struck, but fortunately claiming no lives save at the home of the Nuebauers, the very place I had watched blown to bits. Here a three months old baby was lost in the debris. Home from a first survey of the storm damage, our distraught neighbor boy reported, head in hands, "They can't find the baby!" After a bit of supper he rejoined the search. Few there were at Spring Valley who slept that awful night. Women folk joined neighbors or relatives in their homes, seeking to derive a measure of comfort in numbers, while the men continued to search the rubble. Near daybreak the infant was found, all life gone from its battered form. It was a sad and fearsome time for Spring Valley. Children as well as adults experienced the shock of a sense of unreality the following day. The mud roads, softened by the rainstorm, became packed to pavement hardness before the day ended, the result of heavy traffic of sightseers, viewing the storm's damage. The Oscar Swenson home was the first to go. Visiting at the home of a cousin, Ordella and Gladys, my school friends, missed the experience, and fortunately so. Theirs was a big family, but on that fateful day only four members were at home. The onrushing funnel cloud was discovered just in time for them to jump into the stairwell of the basement steps entered from a trap door on the porch. Here they were buried by cobs from the woodshed as it was lifted over them, disgorging its contents. Cobs being light in weight, it was no problem to dig themselves out. When they viewed the remains of their home, they counted themselves greatly blessed. Not a piece of wood larger than a foot ruler remained. After the first shock of unbelief, the family set to work at once to build a new chicken house, which housed them throughout most of the ensuing winter while work progressed on a new farm home. The building of their home was the only new home I recall seeing in the process of being built throughout childhood. Playing at their home one afternoon, I was fascinated by life in their temporary quarters, and we amused ourselves with the wood shavings planed off the fresh new lumber, fashioning pretend wigs from some of the curls. The familiar, pungent smell of new wood was everywhere. The clean, fresh fragrance was a delight to the nostrils. Woodworking always has had appeal for me. In adult years I delight in visiting the shops of cabinet makers.

That family, too, was to endure tragedy within a short time. Their oldest son lost his life from an accidental gunshot wound one Sunday afternoon as a group of neighbor boys were entertaining themselves shooting pigeons. Visiting cousins, I was called home to attend the funeral of Alvis Swenson, a time of real sorrow at the loss of a schoolmate from Spring Valley. In an area of sparse population, death is a rare visitor, especially where the general populace is made up of young farm families trying to get ahead.

Not long after the upsetting experience of the tornado, the excitement of the opening of a new year of school claimed our attention, and life at Spring Valley returned to a state of normalcy.

88

VI

A Stranger In Our Midst

Invited for an afternoon of play with neighbor girls just before the beginning of a new school year, conversation around the table as we were mutually enjoying afternoon lunch naturally turned to the new school teacher hired for the year. No one knew much about her, as she was from a different locality—from Iowa Falls, which was some thirty miles away. Usually some local girl sought the position. Acquiring a certificate to teach a country school in the twenties was fairly simple. In fact, to my knowledge, the requirements were never raised, though in the over supply period of the depression some rural school teachers did possess two-year training diplomas from college. Unable to get a position in a town school, the rural school assignment afforded some remuneration for their outlay of college expense and offered an opportunity for valuable experience. It should be added that at that time elementary teachers in town schools commonly had only two years of college preparation. To become certified to teach a rural school was a matter of passing tests after attaining a high school diploma. Usually, though, these girls did prepare themselves with a three months "normal" course, and in some cases, one year of college. Some high schools boasted the inclusion of a normal training course in with their high school work, and these girls went right out into teaching positions.

It is not recalled how much training this particular young teacher had to her credit, but I do remember my friend's mother's remarking with mixed feelings, "You will have a 'stranger' for a teacher". A stranger in our midst was always the subject of much speculation. For a few years we had a "stranger" in our home by way of a hired man from Norway. He remained a stranger all the while he was with us, for he refused all efforts to help him learn to speak English. Reticent by nature, he answered my parents only in mono-syllables in his native tongue. My parents knew his language, but were unable to draw him out. He was what was commonly called a "new-comer". "Newcomer" jokes abounded in every community and ours was no exception. The connotation of the label was that of "greenhorn". We in our home gave him every kindness but I'm sure we could not fathom his misery at being unable to communicate readily. Decades later the situation was reversed when my eldest son, Allan, visited relatives in Norway following a tour of duty as a military officer in Germany. My own visit to the home of the same relatives where no English was spoken a few years later, took me back in time to the agony and homesickness that the newcomer must have endured, for he could not have helped feeling the stigma of the newcomer status, whereas we were welcomed as interesting visitors. In later years, any traveler from a foreign country has been welcomed with equal interest and hospitality most everywhere in our nation. We have grown in our understanding and social acceptance of fellow man in this post World War II era. Returning servicemen and increased world wide travel have given us more tolerance, and rightly so.

As for the stranger who was to be our teacher, it was with real excitement that we skipped off to school that first September day to meet and assess her. Our first impressions were entirely favorable, nor did she disappoint us as the school term wore on. A vivacious, clear, blue-eyed brunette, Vivian Dean brought a wholesome vitality to the schoolroom. She won us all over when she introduced herself, then added that to address her as Miss Dean sounded too dignified to her ears, and that she would rather that we would call her "Miss Vivian". "Miss Vivian" she was throughout the year, and we scarcely remembered that she had a last name. Radiating warmth and congeniality, she was not the least pedantic, yet she commanded the respect of every pupil. Not one of us would have thought to question her authority. Calm and poised, she faced the classroom morning after morning, yet seemingly bursting with exuberance. She joined us in play on the playground, making sure everyone was having fun. No school day seemed long that year.

Perhaps more than any other teacher at Spring Valley, she sought to broaden our horizons socially. She enlisted the cooperation of the instructor of the next school to the south, Scott Center, to schedule softball games between the two schools. I can't remember that anything came of that move, as I have recollection of only one visitation from the school, and no memory of a return visit from us. Perhaps this was in the spring of the year, toward the close of the school term, and as with high school baseball some years, unfavorable weather may have necessitated cancellations.

The spelling contest for elementary students of upper elementary grades attracted nationwide interest at that time, with students from both rural and city schools participating. Spelldowns were a favorite form of Friday afternoon game time—sometimes a customary reward for a week of work well done, and also sometimes during the noon hour in winter weather. At Spring Valley we considered ourselves too remote to participate actively beyond our own school, but Miss Vivian aspired to further the competition. The winner from any given school was almost always an eighth grader, since an extra year of spelling study would be to his credit. Merlin was an eighth grader that year, and he won the contest at Spring Valley. Miss Vivian had high hopes for his going further to win the township contest. The contest was scheduled to be held at Scott Center one spring night, with parents of contestants in attendance. Much time and effort were put into his drilling for the big night, both on his part and that of the teacher. I still remember his sitting with spelling book in hand, sometimes pressing me into helping by pronouncing the words. There were to be both written and oral contests. Special care was given to clear enunciation in the contest, with time allowed for the writing of the written word. The contestant, upon spelling the word, was required to abide by certain rules, consistent nationwide. He was to first pronounce the word, spell it correctly, then follow with a second pronunciation. Failure to include either pronunciation immediately disqualified him as a contestant.

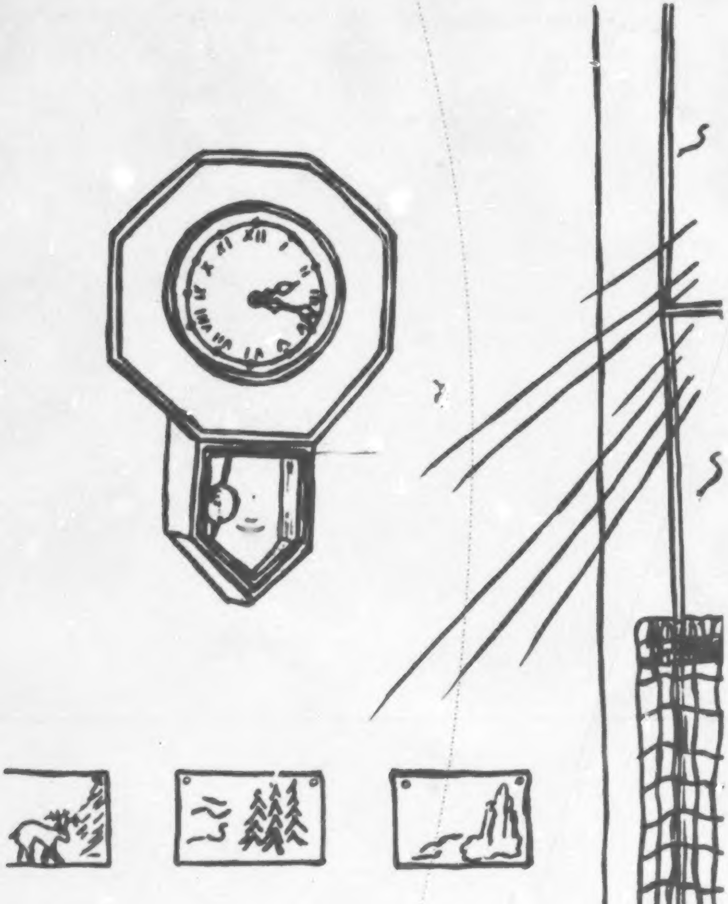
The important night arrived after a spring rain when road conditions were questionable, mud roads that they were. The old Overland had finally been relegated to the farm junk heap and replaced by a Dodge, which had seen some years of service before coming into our possession. Its headlights glimmered feebly and night driving was not cherished. Nevertheless, everyone at our house cooperated in the matter of "doing up the chores early", getting an early supper out of the way, polishing my brother's shoes, pressing his suit, and passing on the contestant's general appearance. At about the right time we all went out to the garage to get into the car, hoping and hoping that "Miss Vivian's" contestant would bring home the honors. Dad stepped on the self starter. There was no response, but that was an old story. He got out the crank, but though he cranked and cranked away, there was not even a sputter.

Disappointed silence pervaded the garage. Dad's cranking arm would take no more. We pleaded that he try just one more time, but still there was no response. Finally we had to admit defeat.

To hitch up a team of horses for the three mile drive was out of the question at that hour, for the contest would be half over before the trip was made. In stunned disbelief we silently made our way back into the house, grimly accepting the fact that we had no recourse but to let "Miss Vivian" down. With no telephone at Scott Center, there was no way to contact her and no way to get there! It was a disappointment to her, to my brother, and, since I have such a sharp memory of it, I must have been impressed by my parent's disappointment, too. We read with interest that year the results of the Hamilton County Spelling Contest, the state contest, and finally the national contest, for it did go on to a national competition.

Perhaps most remembered about the year of the "stranger in our midst" was the community awareness she sponsored. Miss Vivian did not limit her acquaintances to the boundaries of Spring Valley, but she mingled socially with young people of the neighboring school district. Finally, she sought to further perpetuate a give and take between the two communities by enlisting their cooperation in the production of a play, the cast consisting of young adults. The play, "Aaron Slick From Punkin Crick", seemed particularly adapted to our area, and its performance at Scott Center schoolhouse was greatly applauded. They played to a packed house, and it was a memorable night out for us all. Admission was charged, since there were royalties to pay, but I do not recall what was done with any profit gained. Most likely it was divided between the two schools, perhaps to purchase softball equipment.

Miss Vivian herself played the heroine, and she played opposite a dark, handsome young man from the Scott Center community. Naturally we schoolgirls linked her romantically with her hero. To substantiate our romantic notions were rumors that the two were "stepping out" together. We were beside ourselves with excited titters the morning she arrived with a sparkling diamond on the left ring finger. Asking permission to speak to me soon after school was called into session for the day, the news was relayed to me by a friend. Neither the friend nor I could have been very subtle in either giving or receiving the dreamed of information, for, in an effort at stern enforcement of rules, a crisp "Was your request to speak for important business?" was heard from the platform, and with a tolerant twinkling of the eye revealing inner mirth, we were informed, "That will be all. Return to your seat!" Not a titter was heard in the room, but not one of us could wait for recess when we might have free discussion of the exciting news. Miss Vivian married her hero after school was out. They moved away from Spring Valley and Scott Township, but memories of her are treasured in the heart of many a Spring Valley "Alumnus".



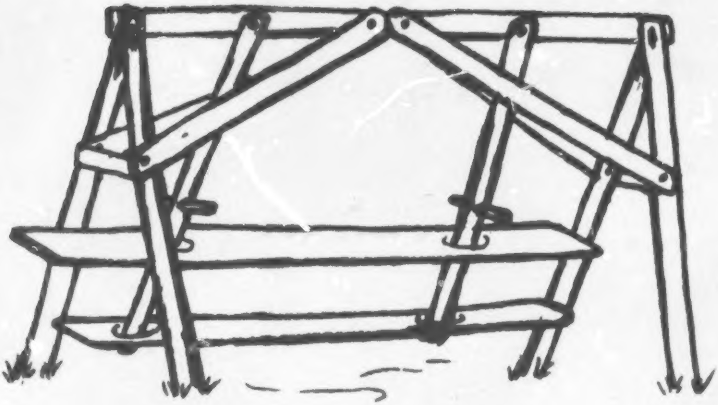
VII

Portents of Progress

During one of my last years at Spring Valley a piece of playground equipment was installed, or rather set out, in the school yard. This was a wooden glider type of swing, painted pristine white, and large enough to accommodate half the enrollment at a time. It was a real favorite of younger children, the older boys had a try at it, and all the girls loved it. When the boys found it would not take their full energy in pumping without its bouncing precariously off the ground in a manner dangerous to smaller riders, they lost interest and returned to their ball playing. Previously there had been a teeter-totter or two, but these had disintegrated with time.

We were elated that our own dear Spring Valley now boasted a most modern piece of play equipment. Little did we know that its advent marked the beginning of a new era in education, the beginning of the end for Spring Valley. Much as we sometimes envied town youngsters what we considered advantages—well equipped playgrounds, gymnasiums for regular periods of physical training, a single teacher for each grade level, the privilege of returning home for the noon meal, or, in the case of outlying country pupils, transportation to and from school—we continued to hold Spring Valley dear to our heart. When acquiring a new writing tablet, we proudly penciled in "Spring Valley" on the line designating "School".

Concerned parents sought to remedy the situation of the cold noon lunch. Under the direction of "Miss Vivian", a program of hot lunches was instituted. Each day, promptly at noon, a parent appeared at the door bearing a huge kettle filled with a hot dish. This was kept warm atop the heat bonnet of the "furnace" which had finally replaced the old heater. Somewhat later, after books had been put away and all hands had been washed, contents were ladled into dishes provided by individual pupils. Supplying the hot dish was managed by a method of rotation, and continued only during the winter months.



Through this program we all were introduced to new and untried foods from varying kitchens. I especially remember the Brinton children's boasting of their mother's "white sauce", which was to be brought in to be served with spinach. We were very skeptical, especially in that it was to be coupled with spinach, but we all ate it and found it to be very tasty. The "white sauce" compared with the creamed vegetables served in our homes, only we were not familiar with the term "white sauce". Milk being plentiful, vegetables were almost without exception served in a side dish with warm milk poured over them, valuable juices undrained, or, on special occasions, with a thickening added. This constituted "creaming" a vegetable in the common parlance of the predominately Scandinavian kitchen of Spring Valley. One family only was not of Scandinavian extraction (Norwegian, to be exact), and to the consternation of us children, our parents referred to them as "American". Puzzling over this in adulthood, I realize that the family descended from European nationalities other than Scandinavian, and that they were several generations removed from immigrant ancestors. Though our own American citizenship was emphasized with pride, grandparents, or at least great-grandparents, of most Spring Valley students were Norwegian immigrants. In our second generation homes Americanization was so complete that no mother tongue was heard spoken, except on rare occasions, but their sense of values remained rooted in the homeland of their fathers.

Through Farm Bureau and the county extension service farm wives were learning about vitamins and minerals, and the preservation of them in vegetable cookery. Capitalizing on the disbursement of such knowledge, a certain manufacturer of heavy aluminum pots and pans held neighborhood demonstrations featuring "waterless cookery". Such a demonstration was held in the form of an evening's entertainment for both wives and husbands in the home of a Spring Valley patron. Pressure was put upon guests to purchase the complete set of cookware for the benefit of family health and nutrition. Most did not buy, money always being in short supply, but valuable lessons were learned in that vegetables came to be cooked in greatly reduced amounts of water.

The installation of the furnace was another indication of the progress which would rapidly bring about the demise of Spring Valley. As a school we were intensely proud of our fine modern heating system. Its installation involved a cold air pipe, designed to bring in cold fresh air from outside. Its outer opening was near the foundation line. When weather was moderate, beginners were given longer recess periods necessarily without actual supervision, though the teacher did keep a wary eye out the window. At one time, these children discovered the cold air register, and the resultant magnification of their voices upon hollering into it. One can readily imagine the sudden shock of loud voices penetrating a quiet schoolroom where all were engaged in studious working of assignments. What naturally followed were loud guffaws, a seized opportunity for relief from tedium for the entire student body. Aware of its potential as a problem, our teacher quietly signalled for order, and ignoring the shouts, proceeded to carry on with the class currently being conducted at the recitation bench. The shouting, having failed to produce the desired effect, never was repeated.

When about midway through the eight years of elementary education at Spring Valley, which at the time seemed to constitute my whole lifetime (the eventual termination of which I knew to be a reality, but a reality of which I could not then personally conceive), we all came to school one morning agog at the headlines in the paper received in our country mailboxes the preceding day. Lindbergh had flown across the Atlantic Ocean! At that time most of us had never observed a plane at close hand. Now and then a rare plane would drone over the school yard. The sound of a motor in the sky was the signal for all to rush to the door to step out into the yard, the better to see the plane. This mass action was entirely condoned by all teachers, as an airplane in the sky was as much of a novelty to them as to us. No matter how serious the lessons being heard, by common consent, an air-

97

plane overhead was an occasion to forsake all, rush outside, search the skies for a glimpse of the plane, then watch it until it disappeared in the distance.

We considered persons daring to ride in such machines as valuing their life very little. None of us ever dreamed that we would some day make use of that mode of transportation. My son, Jeff, who is a jet pilot, has been known to fly from his base in Madison, Wisconsin, to Salt Lake City, Utah, on a specific mission, returning the same day. Not really sure whether or not to expect his return on the same day, my daughter-in-law, Carolyn, remarked, "I was scrubbing the kitchen floor when I heard a jet in the sky, and I knew he was back. Sure enough, in a half hour the phone rang. He was calling to ask me to come to pick him up".

More sophisticated than the rest of us, a schoolmate, Peggy, appeared at school one day in knickers. These were khaki pants worn gathered to a band just below the knee, with an adjustable fastening. Knickers were the first pants to be worn by women and girls. Peggy's mother possessed an advanced sense of fashion, but our day long ridicule spoiled the fun of pants as school attire in the twenties. They never appeared at school again. Just a few years later slacks became accepted apparel for girls enjoying picnics and outings. Another version of these were "play pajamas", a one piece affair with billowing, almost circular-cut pant legs. The knickers were but another sign of impending rapid change in every area, for we were not long removed from skirts of a length to cover the ankle for discreet, grown up young girls. Mature women customarily wore their hair "done up" in some attractive way, or else in a plain bun at the nape of the neck. This, too, changed in the last days of Spring Valley. I remember how my own mother shocked the community by having her hair "bobbed", but soon all were to follow suit, or almost all. Hair dressers were becoming more prominent, and the popular hairdo was the marcel, done with a hot curling iron which crimped the hair into ridges. This was followed by the finger wave, by which method the hair was "set" with a sticky substance made from flaxseed, then dried under the drier. Before long the permanent wave became very common. In its early days it was thought to be a big extravagance.

Perhaps the greatest stride in progress was the radio broadcast of the inaugural ceremonies of President Herbert Hoover. For a sort of on the spot history lesson, as one of the upper classmen I was among Spring Valley students invited to the home of a school patron, Burt Mortvedt, whose radio boasted a loud speaker. Mr. Mortvedt's generosity (as children we had been taught to address him with a respectful "Mr.", rather than a familiar "Burt") extended to his coming to the schoolhouse at mid-morning with a team and wagon to transport us to his home, then returning us to the school premises at the end of the day. Each of us took our regular school lunch with us, eating it while we listened with intent in the "front room" of our schoolmates, Rosella and Amil, whose parents so graciously offered their hospitality. We marvelled at being able to hear with our own ears the inaugural proceedings, along with the newscaster's running account of the events of the day. His account included descriptions of the attire of the important figures. The hat worn by Mrs. Hoover was described at length, but I cannot remember any of the details. I have recently read that such descriptions were a last minute innovation of the announcer's, in desperation for lack of something better to fill in the moments of air time not used by the actual inauguration ceremonies. They proved to be most interesting to the listening audience of the feminine gender.

Radio had changed the way of life for many a country household. The favorite stations of many were those sponsored by seed companies in southwestern Iowa. They were KMA, the Earl May station, and Henry Field's KFNF. The regularity of the programs coming into their homes, along with the annual seed catalogs, and, in one case, a periodical, each giving accounts of family life, were of real interest to our close neighbors, the Tom Tjernagels, as well as many other farm families. Visiting them, they spoke of the various family members as if they were dear and familiar friends. I'm sure such companionship did much to enrich their semi-isolated life on a farm far from town. A good stand of rhubarb grew in their garden. Annually, we children were sent to pull some of the enormous stalks for a spring treat. Anyone growing rhubarb is sure to have an abundance which they are willing to share, and this was true of our hospitable neighbors. A treasured memory of the Tjernagels is the homemade divinity throughout which was distributed a generous amount of chopped maraschino cherries and black walnuts. With these delightful confections they always treated us on a chance visit. Their wedding reception for their son, Junice, and his bride, Gladys, provided Spring Valley with a notable social experience. The reception was held at their home, with all neighbors, friends, and relatives invited. A full meal was served, guests being summoned to the table in relays. I remember only the wedding cake, baked, I think, by the groom's mother. It was not the elaborate, many tiered showpiece common today, but it was at least the height of two angel food cakes, quite the highest cake on which I had ever laid eyes. Iced with a white boiled frosting, fern fronds graced the sides, and fresh flowers were wreathed around it. The following day the young couple left for South Dakota for the purpose of the groom's enrollment at an air pilot's school. He shortly changed his mind and returned home to work his father's farm. Locally, he was thought to have come to his senses, for who could be crazy enough to want to fly? How different his life would have been if he had pursued his dream, for he would have been almost a pioneer in aviation! Farming, too, picked up after World War II, so the second choice was perhaps in the end a gratifying one.

Quite suddenly my elementary education at Spring Valley came to an end. County examinations were administered early in May. With "good marks" I passed them all, becoming eligible for eighth grade graduation and high school. For a week or two my eighth grade teacher found things for me to do at school, but there was no point in her spending any more time teaching me. She kindly and understandably gave me the option of staying home or coming to school, explaining that I would have to keep myself busy if I came. I continued on for a day or two, feeling like a "man without a country", and thereafter decided that my days at Spring Valley were indeed ended, but it was not without sadness in my heart. My grandfather possessed a pair of field glasses which he sometimes let us use. I took advantage of them to view from a distance all that I could see of Spring Valley at recess time, feeling strangely left out.

The left out feeling did not prevail for long, for soon the year's school session came to an end, and it was time for eighth grade graduation at the county seat town of Webster City. It was a momentous occasion, presided over by county superintendent E. F. Snow. "Graduating" girls from all over the county had new graduation dresses, and as a group we marched in to take places in the auditorium. We were handed eighth grade diplomas personally signed by Supt. Snow in his own beautiful free arm penmanship. As aforementioned, mine is a treasured possession, a sort of memorial to a man who never let his handicap handicap him. He was a great inspiration to many a rural school lad and lass of Hamilton County in the early decades of the century, and will long be remembered.

As I left Spring Valley, the year marked the beginning of formal education for Curtis, my younger brother. He was enrolled in the same rural school in the fall of the year. From that

Public School

Hamilton
County

This Certifies That

Clarine Johnson

has completed the Course of Study prescribed by
Law for the Common Schools of Iowa,
and therefore merits this

Diploma

which entitles the holder to admission to any High
School in the State.

Given at Webster City, Iowa, this 11 day
of June 1930

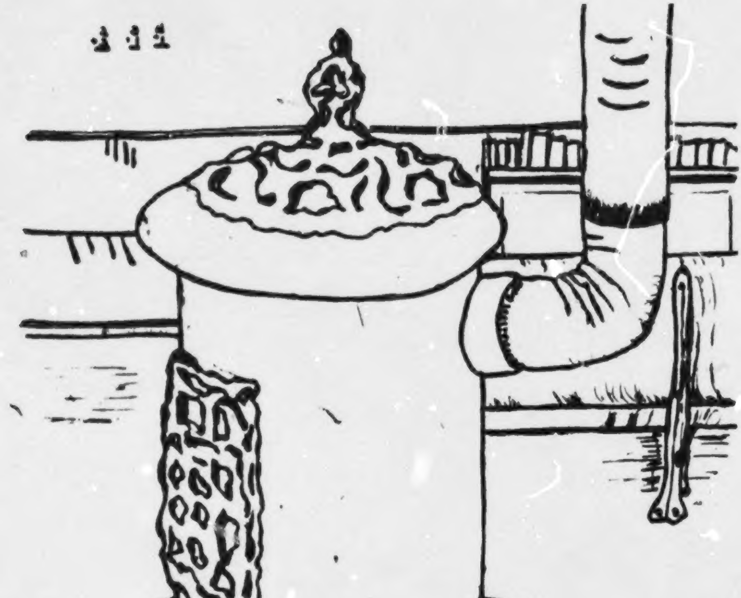
E. H. Snow
County Superintendent

point on he has been most familiarly known as "Curt". One of three beginners, he and his classmates were taken advantage of by the older boys at play time. Seemingly, matching the youngsters in fist fights became the source of entertainment for those in the upper grades. Parents were up in arms when their little ones arrived home from school with a black eye or two at day's end. Clearly something more was needed in the way of playground apparatus. It was then that a pair of basketball goals were set up in the lower schoolyard. With no firm surface, but rather, long prairie grass on which to play, they couldn't have been too satisfactory, but an attempt was made to provide an acceptable outlet for pentup energies.

Time was running out for Spring Valley. School bus transportation was modernized to include busses of a large capacity, roads were improved to allow all weather travel, and the pressure to consolidate and reorganize was felt statewide. Spring Valley was not destined to be a hanger-on. One of the last teachers evidenced more interest in romance than in her teaching duties. Her fiance enjoyed the status of a house guest in her home for days on end. On such visits he accompanied her to school for the day of teaching, and at day's end they walked home together, arms entwined. Needless to say, the advent of spring work on the farm ended this togetherness, but school patrons felt their children deserved more concentrated attention than that. Soon the decision to close Spring Valley was made, and the pupils were disbursed to schools in several of the surrounding towns.

The school house continued to sit neglected on its site, Spring Valley, its yard overgrown with weeds and grasses. After a time the building and its contents were auctioned off, the land reverting back to the owner of the adjacent farm. Thus Spring Valley went into production as a corner of a field.

With it went the community. At this writing my people still reside within the boundaries of the former district, but they are the only ones left. Many a farmstead has been completely abandoned, while others are occupied by families either working for a large scale farmer or by someone seeking inexpensive housing with the benefits of country living. Neighbors have become fewer and more widely separated, and, as in the city, one often never makes the acquaintance of a new neighbor. Their quite temporary residence coupled with the fact of the working wife creates a situation in which one has to go out of the way very much in order to foster any sort of a relationship with a new neighbor. Also the new neighbors themselves most often do not want to be bothered. Each family seeks instead its own "peer" group.



VIII

Rooted, Yet Wings to Soar

The definition of education, or perhaps rather our understanding of what exactly constitutes education, has undergone a huge metamorphosis during the course of the century. The change is more than just the so-called progress in education that has been going on all down through the centuries. There have long been the pros and cons of phonics as a tool in teaching reading, of stern discipline versus a relaxed classroom humming with interesting activity, the arguments as to the appropriateness of teaching religious values and morals in the classroom, and the feasibility of time allowed for extra-curricular activities as well as just how much of the financial burden of these activities should be carried by the budget. It has been said that educational progress is circular in nature. One generation learns meticulous phonics, sentence diagraming as an aid to language training, and suffers much drill in the basic facts of mathematics. Growing into parenthood that generation is horror stricken to find that beginning reading is taught by methods other than the sounding out of words, and that too much emphasis on phonics is considered an adherent to fluent reading and reading for context; that speed tests and flash card drill in arithmetic are felt to put too great a pressure on a child's nerves, and that, while the parts of speech are still taught, the emphasis is rather on ability to express oneself well. By the time the third generation becomes of school age, grandparents are apt to find that the pendulum has swung back the other way, or that "progress" in education has once again come full circle.

In the days of Spring Valley, for the remote countryside, rural education in the one room school was all that was humanly possible at that point in economic and technological progress. That the physical plant was indeed deficient, as compared to the then modern brick buildings in schools of city and town, was apparent to everyone. Parents of Spring Valley were hardly concerned about this, however. The general feeling was that physical hardship developed character. There was no concern for socalled equalization of educational opportunities throughout the state. Our school was supported by the taxes levied solely on the farm property located within the boundaries of the county, and pro-rated to each rural district consisting of four sections of land.* Urban districts providing modern plants in no way contributed financially to our system. We would not have had it otherwise. To want to "get something for nothing" was considered the lowest of aspirations.

Subject matter taught in the schools was governed by strict adherence to the State Course of Study, as was that taught in urban schools at that time. The Course of Study outlined specifically just what material was to be taught in mathematics in a given grade, what should be covered in history for each grade, and the same for all other courses. Naturally it was absorbed at different levels by various pupils, but it had to be presented to the class before the year was over. This was required practice on the elementary level in Iowa schools, rural or urban, up into the thirties. Actually, in the case of especially bright pupils, the teaching in some rural schools was often ahead of that in the city school. This was naturally true in the case of single pupil grades. Heavier assignments were usually made to keep the bright child busy so as not to allow him to waste time!

Undoubtedly there were many inadequacies in the rural school. Academically, however, they had to have done a good job. Consider the stringent examinations pupils were subjected to before entering secondary education. A really good basic academic preparation for furthering one's education was most often the rule of the rural school. In my freshman year of high school, I ranked high in the county in "academic tests" customarily given every year. Two or three selected students from each county were invited to participate on the state level in each subject, becoming eligible for further honors. Along with two others from our small town high school, I was the proud recipient of such an honor. Teaching of mathematics at Spring Valley had to have been more than adequate to have given me the background for superior achievement in algebra.

Without a doubt we were culturally deprived. The deprivation was not as complete as one might assume, however. Walls of our schoolroom were hung with several good art prints. Recalled to memory were "The Gleaners", Jean Francois Millet, "The Helping Hand", Emile Renouf, and "Old Ironsides", (U.S.S. Constitution) William James Aylward. With the latter we learned to associate the poem of Oliver Wendell Holmes:

106

OLD IRONSIDES[11]

Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!
Long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see
That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
And burst the cannon's roar;—
The meteor of the ocean air
Shall sweep the clouds no more!

Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,
Where knelt the vanquished foe,
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,
And waves were white below,
No more shall feel the victor's tread,
Or know the conquered knee;—
The harpies of the shore shall pluck
The eagle of the sea!

Oh, better that her shattered hulk
Should sink beneath the wave;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
And there should be her grave;
Nail to the mast her holy flag,
Set every threadbare sail,
And give her to the god of storms,
The lightning and the gale!

Almost certainly we were taught the circumstances prompting the writing of the poem, a protest against the proposed breaking up of the frigate "Constitution". From the teacher's copy of "The Normal Instructor", the subscription for which was financed by her personally, we had art appreciation studies. I well remember the particular issue with a whole page full of small reprints of "Old Ironsides". From this page we were permitted to cut the prints to be glued into our own art booklets. We recorded in writing that which we had learned about the picture and the artist.

The study of literature was incidental throughout a number of textbooks, chiefly the readers and language books. From a reader in the early grades I remember only "Little Gustava", as aforementioned, but there must have been other selections in the graded series.

The poetry we studied was learned very well. We not only learned about the poets, but we were required to memorize entire poems. Naturally, down through the years the retention is lost, but they do come back when heard again.

Favorites from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow are here listed:

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH[12]

Under a spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,

How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling—rejoicing—sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou has taught!
Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought!

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR [13]

Between the dark and the daylight,
  When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations
  That is known as the Children's Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me
  The patter of little feet,
The sound of a door that is opened,
  And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,
  Descending the broad hall stair,
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
  And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence:
  Yet I know by their merry eyes
They are plotting and planning together
  To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,
  A sudden raid from the hall!
By three doors left unguarded
  They enter my castle wall!

They climb up into my turret
O'er the arms and back of my chair;
If I try to escape, they surround me;
They seem to be everywhere.

They almost devour me with kisses,
Their arms about me entwine,
Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen
In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine!

Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
Because you have scaled the wall,
Such an old mustache as I am
Is not a match for you all!

I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeon
In the round-tower of my heart.

And there will I keep you forever,
Yes, forever and a day,
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,
And moulder in dust away!

HIAWATHA'S CHILDHOOD [14]

By the shores of Gitchee Gumee,
By the shining Big-Sea-Water,
Stood the wigwam of Nokomis,
Daughter of the Moon, Nokomis.
Dark behind it rose the forest,
Rose the black and gloomy pine-trees,
Rose the firs with cones upon them;
Bright before it beat the water,
Beat the clear and sunny water,
Beat the shining Big-Sea-Water.

●●●●●●

At the door on summer evenings
Sat the little Hiawatha;
Heard the whispering of the pine-trees,
Heard the lapping of the waters,
Sounds of music, words of wonder;

"Minne-wawa!" said the pine-trees,
"Mudway-aushka!" said the water.

* * *

"Wah-wah-taysee, little firefly,
Little, flitting, white-fire insect,
Little, dancing, white-fire creature,
Light me with your little candle,
Ere upon my bed I lay me,
Ere in sleep I close my eyelids!"

* * *

Then the little Hiawatha
Learned of every bird its language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How they built their nests in Summer,
Where they hid themselves in Winter,
Talked with them whene'er he met them,
Called them "Hiawatha's Chickens".
Of all beasts he learned the language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How the beavers built their lodges,
Where the squirrels hid their acorns,
How the reindeer ran so swiftly,
Why the rabbit was so timid,
Talked with them whene'er he met them,
Called them "Hiawatha's Brothers".

—From "The Song of Hiawatha"

THE ARROW AND THE SONG[15]

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;

And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

John Greenleaf Whittier's "The Barefoot Boy"[16] had a special meaning for us because it correlated our own summer experiences:

THE BAREFOOT BOY

Blessings on thee, little man,
Barefoot boy, with cheek of tan!
With thy turned-up pantaloons,
And thy merry whistled tunes;
With thy red lip, redder still
Kissed by strawberries on the hill;
With the sunshine on thy face,
Through thy torn brim's jaunty grace;
From my heart I give thee joy—
I was once a barefoot boy!

Oh for boyhood's painless play,
Sleep that wakes in laughing day,
Health that mocks the doctor's rules,
Knowledge never learned of schools,

••••••

For, eschewing books and tasks,
Nature answers all he asks;
Hand in hand with her he walks,
Face to face with her he talks,
Part and parcel of her joy—
Blessings on thee, barefoot boy!

We all learned the story of George Washington and the cherry tree, now questioned as authoritative, but we believed it firmly.

A lesson in persistence was ingrained in us through memorization of T. H. Palmer's "Try, Try Again". It is a lesson that returns to me o'er and o'er, always conjuring up the sunlit interior of the Spring Valley schoolroom where I first learned the lines. They have been a great stimulus throughout life.

TRY, TRY AGAIN[17]

T. H. Palmer

" 'Tis a lesson you should heed,
Try, try again;
If at first you don't succeed,
Try, try again;
Then your courage should appear,
For, if you will persevere,
You will conquer, never fear;
Try, try again.

For "opening exercises", it was often customary for the rural school teacher to read books or literary excerpts. I remember especially "Evangeline",[18] to which we all listened with rapt attention, a lump in our throats when hearing of the young lovers passing on the Mississippi on separate boats, unknown to either:

"Swiftly they glided along, close under the lee of the island,
But by the opposite bank, and behind a screen of palmettos,
So that they saw not the boat, where it lay concealed in the willows;
All undisturbed by the dash of their oars, and unseen, were the sleepers.
Angel of God was there none to awaken the slumbering maiden.
Swiftly they glided away, like the shade of a cloud on the prairie.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Another remembered reading, "The Shepherd Of The Hills", Harold Bell Wright, acquainted us with the pathos of human life in the back country of the Ozarks. We thrilled to the suspense of the phantom in the woods, the plight of the 'city-fellow' totally unaware of a panther's silent approach with attack inevitable, and the fight between the two muscular woodsmen. We romanticized about the courtship of 'Sammy', and I suppose we gleaned something in the way of ideals from the philosophizing of the shepherd.

Music training must have been inadequate, since we learned no theory until preparation for the county exam taken in the seventh grade. My particular score on that test was 100%, so we must have had good instruction at the time. A year or so of piano lessons from a teacher in town may have been responsible in part for the perfect score, however. What we lacked in theory and music appreciation, we gained in actual joy of participation. No one ever worked with us to develop our ear or to maintain harmony, but every day in opening exercises we sang lustily, without accompaniment, a few of the songs dear and familiar to us. We sang songs such as "Juanita", Mrs. Caroline Norton, "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean", "When You And I Were Young, Maggie", George W. Johnson, J. A. Butterfield and "Reuben and Rachel", evidence of the "battle of the sexes", a timeless controversy of lesser impact a half century ago than in these days of "women's lib". Everyone had a favorite, and was eager to be selected to name a choice. I well remember the favorite of many a boy:

OLD BLACK JOE [19]

Stephen Foster

Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay;
Gone are my friends from the cotton fields away;
Gone from the earth to a better land I know,
I heard their gentle voices calling "Old Black Joe!"

I'm coming, I'm coming,
For my head is bending low;
I hear those gentle voices calling,
"Old Black Joe!"

It gave the boys a chance to demonstrate the deep bass tones of their voices, a source of pride to any boy approaching adolescence.

Our own experiences with bringing water from the spring in the valley made dear to our hearts "The Old Oaken Bucket"[20]:

"How dear to this heart are the scenes of my childhood,
When fond recollection presents them to view!
The orchard, the meadow, the deep-tangled wildwood,
And every loved spot which my infancy knew;
The wide-spreading pond, and the mill that stood by it;
The bridge and the rock where the cataract fell;
The cot of my father, the dairy-house nigh it,
And e'en the rude bucket which hung in the well!
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket which hung in the well.

How sweet from the green mossy brim to receive it,
As poised on the curb, it inclined to my lips!
Not a full blushing goblet could tempt me to leave it,
Though filled with the nectar which Jupiter sips;
And now, far removed from thy loved situation,
The tear of regret will intrusively swell,
As fancy reverts to my father's plantation,
And sighs for the bucket which hangs in the well;
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket, which hangs in the well.
—Samuel Woodworth

Though they gave us a feeling of sadness, "Old Folks at Home" and "My Old Kentucky Home" were often chosen:

OLD FOLKS AT HOME [21]

Stephen Foster

"Way down upon de Swanee Ribber,
Far, far away,
Dere's wha' my heart is turning ebber,
Dere'e wha' de old folks stay.

All up and down de whole creation
Sadly I roam,
Still longing for de old plantation,
And for de old folks at home.

Chorus:
All de world am sad and dreary,
Ebrywhere I roam;
Oh, darkies, how my heart grows weary,
Far from de old folks at home!

MY OLD KENTUCKY HOME [22]

Stephen Foster

The sun shines bright in the old Kentucky home;
'Tis summer, the darkies are gay;
The corn top's ripe, and the meadow's in the bloom,
While the birds make music all the day.
The young folks roll on the little cabin floor,
All merry, all happy, and bright;
By-'n-by hard times comes a knocking at the door:—
Then my old Kentucky home, good night!

Chorus:

Weep no more, my lady; Oh, weep no more today!
We will sing one song for the old Kentucky home,
For the old Kentucky home, far away.

The racial connotation was lost on us. We were impressed by the melancholy words and tune. A snappy tune loved by us all was "Dixie", Daniel Decatur Emmett:[23]

Chorus:

Den I wish I was in Dixie! Hooray! Hooray!
In Dixie's land we'll take our stand,
to lib an' die in Dixie,
Away, away, away down south in Dixie!
Away, away, away down south in Dixie!

The patriotic songs were naturally included, with "America",[24] Samuel Francis Smith, the favorite because of its simplicity:

"My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the Pilgrims' pride,
From every mountain-side
Let Freedom ring.

My native country, thee,
Land of the noble free—
Thy name I love;
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills
Like that above.

Let music swell the breeze,
And ring from all the trees
Sweet Freedom's song;
Let mortal tongues awake,
Let all that breathe partake,
Let rocks their silence break—
The sound prolong.

Our fathers' God, to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing;
Long may our land be bright
With Freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King.

"America The Beautiful"[25], Katharine Lee Bates, was sung with deep feeling:

"O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

"O beautiful for pilgrim feet,
Whose stern, impassioned stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!

"O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved,
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness
And every gain divine!

"O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee

And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

"Battle-Hymn of The Republic", Julia Ward Howe, was another favorite of the boys, because of its martial air. Hymns were included, among them "Onward Christian Soldiers", Sabine-Baring-Gould, Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan, another song sung with enthusiasm by the boys.

Our country's national anthem was slighted because of the difficulty of the tune. No teacher at Spring Valley during the years of my attendance was a soloist with a trained voice, and to teach the tune of the national anthem without the aid of accompaniment may have seemed a great undertaking. We did, however, learn the lines, another requirement for the county examinations, as well as the author of them, and the circumstances under which they came to be written. Proficiency in the leading of the singing of the national anthem was something I could have used in later life when I served as a Cub Scout Den Mother.

We learned incidentally the quality of diligence through singing "Work, For The Night Is Coming"[26], Anna L. Coghill, Lowell Mason:

"Work, for the night is coming,
Work thru the morning hours;
Work while the dew is sparkling,
Work 'mid springing flow'rs;
Work when the day grows brighter,
Work in the glowing sun;
Work, for the night is coming,
When man's work is done.

"Home, Sweet Home" projected us into the future when we knew, but could not quite comprehend, the full import of the fact that we would some day leave our own childhood homes, remembering them nostalgically in our hearts.

"Yankee Doodle" had a catchy tune that no one could resist, and the chorus hinted of romantic notions to come.

As can be readily seen, music at Spring Valley was confined for the most part to American folk tunes, or school songs. We had never heard of the three B's or of any other of the great masters, but we loved to sing. Augmenting this exposure to music was my own father's love of music. He taught me to chord on [illegible] piano, accompanying him as he played his fiddle by ear.

He played such tunes as "Turkey in the Straw", "My Pretty Redwing", and "Oh, Susanna". Evenings thus spent were a delight to both of us. I once aspired to play the violin (fiddle to Dad), but was encouraged instead to take further piano lessons. That ambitious goal was then put aside, and my father's cherished fiddle hangs unused in a shadow box as part of the decor of my home. Through high school glee club I did learn much of music appreciation. Our school was fortunate to secure for vocal music instruction, graduates of St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, a school noted for its music training and achievement. For a year or two, the vocal instructor was also my piano teacher. Failing to become diligent in practice, I never did become an accomplished pianist, but through piano instruction I learned to love classical music and to enjoy listening to the performance of it. Not having delved into it deeply, as to movement, opus, fugue, etc., I naturally cannot listen with the discerning ear of the critic, but a concert is never too long to capture my listening ear and there is ever a song in my heart. To authenticate the above premise, I quote R. D. Darrell from his book "Good Listening"27:

> "Great as their enjoyment may be, most listeners nourish a peculiar inferiority complex. . . . The most important thing in listening, I'm convinced, is not the formation of respectful attitudes toward the accepted masterpieces, or the hearing of any kind of music with only lukewarm enthusiasm. It is the vital response to the decisive moments of revelation—moments that shock our personalities into full self-awareness and often incandescently illuminate our lives outside as well as in music."

With this interest I have wondered in later years at the lack of stimulus to pursue music more fully. It is possible that the social stigma of the student in high school from the back country and its resultant lack of self-confidence in adolescence were responsible, as much as lack of background in music training.

Health education at Spring Valley was adequate in the teaching of good health practices, such as nutrition, sanitation, the harmful effects to the body of tobacco and alcohol, deep breathing of fresh air, and proper exercise and rest, and the instruction was taken seriously. Sanitation at school was practiced as well as possible, considering the limited facilities. Because of the sparseness of the population and limited transportation to many social functions outside the community, we were perhaps spared bouts of illness prevalent in more crowded classrooms. Of course there was no school nurse to diagnose our ailments or to determine whether or not we should be in school. Naturally, as with all children, we were sometimes afflicted with the common cold and mild stomach upsets. Preschool health examinations were unheard of, as were eye tests. In fact, there was no child at Spring Valley who had been fitted with glasses. For a child to wear glasses was almost shameful, as he was considered to have "weak eyes". Without a doubt, had eye tests been routine, there would have been eye glasses in evidence. Dental care was also almost non-existent. By means of a set of artificial teeth, both upper and lower, provided by the county, we were given definite instruction in regular and proper brushing.

Gone from the scene today is the rural school. Gone from the scene is Spring Valley. Gone from the hill is the schoolhouse and the spring below, as it seems to have worn itself out. The creek no longer meanders picturesquely for it has been straightened. The ground is farmed right up to its banks, as the straightening has eliminated spring flooding. What a thrilling sight we sometimes woke to after heavy spring rains coupled with melting snows! The entire pasture would then be inundated, and we had a virtual, if temporary, lake on our farm.

Gone from the scene is more than the physical plant or the populace who once passed through its gates. It is said of a home town that, while you never really leave it in your heart, neither can you ever really return, for, upon returning, you'll find that things are not the same. The obliteration of Spring Valley is even more complete, for with its passing was included the passing of an age.

Whether or not we suffered from inadequate education depends upon our understanding of education. According to yesterday's standards of formal learning it must have been adequate. Many of our nation's great had their beginnings in the one room rural school. We perhaps suffered most from lack of association with contemporaries. Depending upon personal traits, this lack was often responsible for lack of self-confidence. Opportunities to develop social poise and composure were seldom to be had at Spring Valley, or if they were, they were forgotten when suddenly we became a part of a larger student body. Trying out for glee club on one of the first days of my freshman year in high school was sheer torture for me—new surroundings, new classmates, a new instructor, and the knowledge of a scanty music background contributed to my unsureness, but I was overjoyed to learn that I had made the grade.

On the other side, I cannot help but think how refreshing a "scared kid" from the country would be to today's high school instructor, as compared with the usual sophisticated ninth grader, many of whom have spent night after night "out on the town" throughout junior high.

The era of the country school is an era that is gone forever. It is pleasant to look back with nostalgia to Spring Valley, but it was not all the good old days. There was much hardship for everyone concerned—parents, teachers, pupils. There were almost no physical comforts, no machines to make light of hard work, no antibiotics to work miraculous cures for the most stubborn infection, life span was considerably shorter, and to have attained the age of fifty years was considered to be of an old age. Nor was there time for much enjoyment of nature though surrounded by it. The fight to stay on top economically took all the time of the farmer and his family. There was family togetherness, but usually it was to perform some form of work rather than a type of recreation. Always, however, there was hope! The average family worked toward the time when they could have better housing, when they might have time and money to travel, to entertain and enjoy friends, and when better education could be provided for their children. The dream of college for their children seemed far fetched financially, though college expense was minute as compared to today's costs. Growing up in that era, both my husband and I managed to attain two year's of college education. My training enabled me to fulfill my life dream of becoming a primary teacher, while my husband left school to go into the family business, filling a need there. We were among the fortunate of our age, for a four year college degree was the exception rather than the ordinary. Those who were able to secure advanced education at all usually attained just enough to become self-supporting. By way of contrast, each of our five has achieved a bachelor's degree, with subsequent masters or doctors degrees. Quentin, the youngest, has been awarded the certificate of Certified Public Accountant. His employment is with one of the nation's large accounting firms. The contemporaries of our children, too, have in most instances attained higher education, or, at least, have gone on to vocational training.

However, in the past decade or two, something has been happening to our philosophy of education. Education as book learning is no longer deemed of such great importance. The emphasis is on learning to enjoy life and living. Goals for personal achievement are outmoded, almost to the point of being considered to be selfish if cherished. Secondary education, especially, has come to mean something far different from that of former years. A high school diploma no longer means that one has studied science at length, especially in advanced fields such as physics, once a required subject, that one has good command of written and spoken English, or that a broad knowledge of literature has been acquired. Freedom to choose electives, and electives of a nature that once were considered to be extra-curricular, is a growing tendency. In fact, a given school is considered to be deficient if there are not in its curriculum a very large range of "Course Offerings". College preparation is included, but the emphasis is not on college preparation. The current philosophy is to have something for everyone, the object, to keep all in school throughout the secondary level, academic interest or not. Students themselves are surveyed for popularity of subjects offered. Seeking to break monotony, the mini-course has been invented. These courses are offered for a six or nine week period, rather than a full semester. The latest, high in popularity, is a "Value Systems Course". In theory it is designed to supplant the supposed current dire lack of training for a good value sense in the home and the church. It bears the potential of becoming a veritable hornet's nest, depending upon the person administering the course and subject matter presented. Civil rights legislation requires that school personnel no longer be subjected to demands of an exemplary personal life, ignoring the established fact that "Do as I say, not as I do" has never been an effective method of teaching either in the home or in the school.

Collective bargaining has become a part of the education scene. The Education Association has been cited as the most powerful of organized groups, negotiating annually in the matter of salary scales and expected duties. At the same time budget ceilings have been imposed upon school finances. School administration must necessarily be concerned with the priority of finances, rather than the education of the individual. Equality of financial reimbursement as compared with other professions may have been overdue in the field of education, but with value received. To the contrary, more for less seems to be indicated. At this writing colleges are deploring the lack of preparation in the way of language usage and ability to express thoughts either written or orally, a fact verified by our son, Karl, who for a couple years instructed classes of freshman English as a graduate assistant in a large university, while his wife, Cheryl, continued study toward a degree. Could it be that we are heading for a whole generation of uneducated in the way of formal book learning, a whole generation with only a limited vocabulary at its command? With every advantage over yesterday's educational opportunities, we must reassess our goals, our achievements, and, yes, our needs.

We need to consider the validity of so lightly discarding formal book learning in the use of the taxpayer's educational dollar. It is true that desirable educational goals are to educate the whole person. The development and training of the mind are a vital part of the whole. Once secondary education is completed there is never again such an opportunity to acquire knowledge, for only in the formal classroom can the disciplines of learning be applied. To shun them is to close doors for the whole of a lifetime. Wisely, we would take the best out of the past—the increased understanding of fellowman, acceptance of minority groups, respect for all modes of earning a living, well trained and more highly reimbursed educational staffs, well written and interestingly illustrated textbooks, the development of a variety of media as an aid to teaching, an all time high educational level among school patrons with a resultant greater appreciation of that which constitutes really good education, and, last but not least, the expensive, beautiful physical plants—to offer our youth an education heretofore unattained.

The current push to reorganize is toward a larger concept of school than ever before attained in history. In theory, through centralization efficient, high quality education will be achieved. Proponents of this theory fail to take into consideration geographical distances, the physical well-being of the young child as concerns the ensuing lengthy bus rides, and the value of individualized instruction in the small classroom. The motivation to reorganize is the predicted opportunity to include vast numbers of courses of a type that formerly were considered mere enrichment courses. In themselves they are of value, but at what cost? Aside from monetary costs there is the loss to a large number of students on the secondary level of traditional academic learning, and to the nation in the development of minds able to grasp visions of the future. Without this learning, research in every field will suffer from a dearth of man power, of minds trained to search, to solve, and to persevere. Only the few of high school age who have the wisdom to early define life goals and to resist peer pressure will choose to pursue advanced math, science, English, history and government that a few decades ago were required credits for high school graduation.

When considering the quality of education we must remember that bigger is not necessarily better—or worse; nor is smaller necessarily poorer—or better. It has been ventured that there is no such thing as a "good school"—that all schools are mediocre but that somehow each generation is educated. We can then only **strive** toward good schools. Our goal ought to be to seek to provide the best education financially possible today. Efficiency is unheard of in the field of recreation. Why, then, in education? Perhaps the most pertinent answer lies in the individual classroom instructor, for to truly teach—is to love!

It has been said that the whole world is only a generation away from illiteracy. Failure to teach a given generation could result in a whole world population of illiterates. It is a grave responsibility that rests upon educators of each succeeding generation. We must not only offer, but stimulate to learn, and to the enjoyment of learning. To be merely entertained is fine for recreation, but entertainment as a lifetime goal is bound to produce unprecedented boredom and a warped sense of values.

The responsibility, in fact, rests upon the entire nation. Much of the change in educational values is due to the rapid change in living modes in America, of which the most significant is our mobility. Surveys reveal a dire lack of roots caused by the many moves of the average American family. It has been suggested by sociologists that the maintenance of a family "second home", or summer vacation home, is valuable in the establishment of roots for growing children. The theory is that a return to the same vacation spot year after year may provide the continuity repeatedly broken by intermittent moving of the family home.

Mobility within the community in itself produces unstable home life—the working mother absent from home a part of the day and likewise the socalled "volunteer" homemaker, the termination of whose services any given community would greatly miss, but which takes mother out of the home often on a much larger scale than a regular work schedule, community involvement of fathers so necessary to keep today's community life running smoothly, and the extensive extra-curricular activities of school children. In numerous homes there is often not an hour in the day when it is possible for the entire family to enjoy a meal together. It is the author's opinion that an inviolable dinner hour ought to be established in each and every community. Our nation needs nothing less than a new law, but perhaps it will take legislation to provide that no school activity, athletic or otherwise, practice or performance, be permitted during a set dinner hour, or better yet, hour and a half. Athletic teams win no more games with extended practice that runs over into the family dinner hour. Yet it has become standard practice, as a given school must compete with others fostering such lengthy practice sessions. In the field of school athletics itself we have lost sight of the original intent—to build strong, capable physical bodies. Rightly, athletics should exist for the school, rather than the school for athletics. The purpose of athletics on the secondary level ought not be to groom prospective professionals or even for the purpose of supplying colleges with super athletes. Even the basic rules of sanitation are generally no longer observed in athletics. Notable among these is the practice of the common drinking cup. As a result whole teams are often afflicted with colds or stomach upsets. Forgotten is the discovery a half century ago of the common drinking cup as a bearer of bacteria. This discovery is given much credit for the virtual stamping out of tuberculosis.

Out of the concern for adequate mid-day meals for school children a half century ago has evolved the school lunch room. Equipped with complete kitchens and adequately staffed, our schools today offer every facility for good nutrition. Until a decade or two ago students were required to eat the healthful meals, though they have not always been popular, unless a special request from a parent excused the child. Currently it is common practice among numerous high schoolers to skip lunch in lieu of the soft drink vending machine. In fact, a certain school has substituted volume produced "junk foods" purchased from a hamburger stand for the school lunches, the theory being that this food is eaten. Perhaps it is better than empty stomachs, but what about education for good nutrition as a vital part of educating the whole child?

The noon lunch hour itself has been cut drastically, specifically to eliminate lengthy noon duty for school personnel. In numerous schools the already harassed homemaker is expected to "volunteer" her time to supervise these periods. What will become of our nation when the volunteer homemaker fully realizes her own "civil rights"? Of no other segment of our population is so much demanded—for zero reimbursement! I suppose there never will be a return to the full noon **hour** at school, but what a loss to the child in the way of relaxation from classroom pressure, free periods to socialize, and release from pent up energies on the playground. Could this in part be responsible for distorted value systems?

A glimmer of light on the horizon is the growing interest in the gifted child. For a number of years we have been most concerned with the lower end of the intelligence scale. Because public schools must take all comers, standards of learning are oftened gauged to the lower bracket. It is indeed well that they receive special attention to develop their full potential, but we have forgotten that our leaders in progress usually come from the upper levels. To neglect to stimulate and develop the mind of the gifted is a great loss to all of humanity.

I note with pleasure the revival of interest in the national spelling contest and of local classroom spelling contests held with regularity in a few schools in recent years. Shades of the past, perhaps it will stimulate to interest in learning and in excellence. A dedicated teacher was recently heard to remark with candid observation: "Education isn't very popular at the present time". How very sad. Education ought not be either popular or unpopular. Education just is a fact of life and living—it just IS; it should just BE: it, in fact, **MUST** be!

Yes, Spring Valley is gone forever, and with it are also gone many educational values. At Spring Valley education was cherished! We lacked much of today's advantages, but it has been said that a true teacher is able to teach on a busy street corner with no textbooks or tools. At Spring Valley we were deeply rooted in our environment as well as in family relationships and traditions, as was the surrounding community. Nor did we have the problem of "sameness" or the "ghetto like" neighborhood, such as is prevalent in many city developments today. Seldom did we go into a neighbor's house and see repeated our room arrangement, our tables or chairs, our floor covering if any, or our decorating accessories, the latter of which were few and far between. Aside from a vase or two, money was seldom spent for anything that was not important for daily use.

Our roots were firmly established, yet we were given wings to soar. Parents and teachers alike encouraged pupils to make the most of their educational advantages, to do their lessons to the best of their ability, and to consider professions, careers, and achievements far beyond the ordinary. We were encouraged to set goals. In our dreams we might become anything we chose. Some of us realized our dreams while some settled for continuation in the pattern of the preceding generation, but in Spring Valley we all share a rich heritage.

There really is no point in striving to compare the education afforded by Spring Valley with today's elementary education, as there is no going back. We have gone beyond the point of no return. Spring Valley, exemplifying the rural schools of the nation in the early decades of the twentieth century, simply is no more. With nostalgia, we remember.

"I wandered today to the hill, Maggie,[28]
To watch the scene below,
The creek and the old rusty mill, Maggie,
Where we sat in the long, long ago.
The green grove is gone from the hill, Maggie,
Where first the daisies sprung;
The old rusty mill is still, Maggie,
Since you and I were young.

••••••

Let us sing of the days that are gone, Maggie,
When you and I were young.

—George W. Johnson
J. A. Butterfield

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* Inconclusive research—the rural school may have been supported from taxes levied on the specific four sections of land making up the school district. There was no state or federal financial aid.

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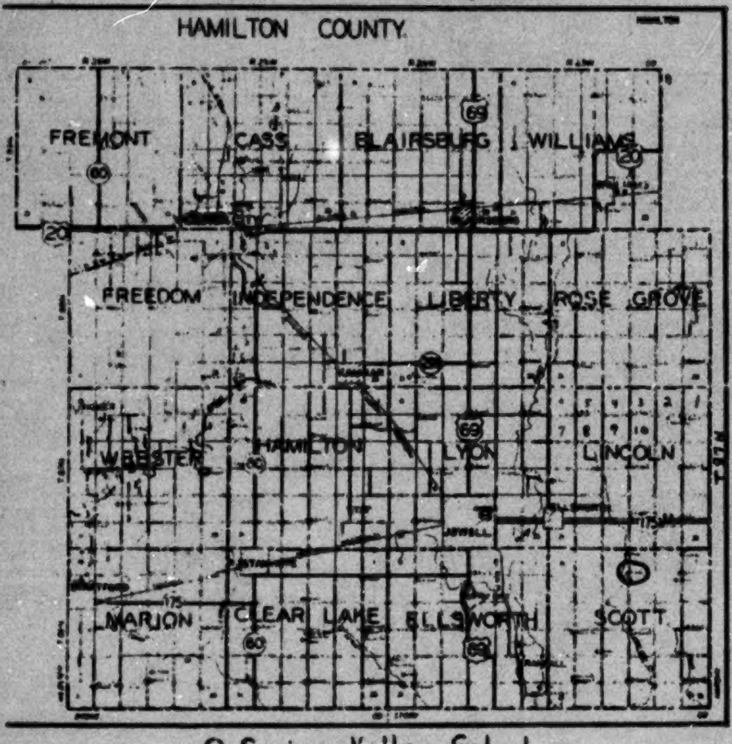

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